A Woman Reads the Gospel of Luke

LORETTA DORNISCH

A WOMAN READS THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Loretta Dornisch

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INTRODUCTION

Was the Gospel of Luke written by a woman?

Can the Gospel of Luke speak to women today?

Although there are no definitive answers, biblical scholars find in the text of Luke's Gospel world views which reflect the experience and importance of women in first-century Christian communities. Those world views are strong enough to raise the question of the influence of women on the writing of the Gospel of Luke. Indeed, interpretations through the centuries have recognized this influence.

While we cannot answer the first question of authorship, we can read the Gospel in the light of current approaches to the Scriptures, but from a woman's perspective. We can bring to such a reading women's experience today. Such reading can open up new ways of reading the text as well as new insights for living the Christ life today.

The present time is rich in the number of women scholars who are reading the received texts anew. Outstanding in the New Testament is the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza whose *In Memory of Her* (Crossroad: New York, 1985) set new foundations for studying the Scriptures. Under her leadership and that of others, completed and projected studies are opening the way to revised understandings of traditional texts. In *A Woman Reads the Gospel of Luke,* we rely on these studies as well as on traditional interpretations but take additional latitude in order to play as well as work with the text. It is hoped that this may enable us to break out of the oppression of any stereotyped reading, not for the sake

of novelty but for the sake of reading the stories anew and making them new for our times and places.

A Woman Reads the Gospel of Luke is a commentary in a reflective sense, in the long tradition of striving to make the Gospel live for us today. The reader is invited to use imagination and new questions to make the Gospel live again.

Points of View

Several points of view will provide different perspectives. Too often today we have available only one or two perspectives which can tend to limit the text. We may take the point of view of a biblical scholar, in which we use an interpretation of someone trained in historical-critical methodology and perhaps in one or more other approaches. Some current approaches include structuralism, literary criticism, or theological interpretation within a particular tradition. Out of their histories, these traditions may emphasize rational, dogmatic, or charismatic approaches.

Until recently most of these included a male or even patriarchal point of view. It is time for more and more women to bring their perspectives to the Scriptures. Some will continue in the traditional approaches. Others will make a break which seems radical but which is seeking for God in the continuing tradition of hundreds of years of persons seeking "the Lord."

Inclusive language is essential in our current search. The cultures from which our Scriptures come are dominantly masculine and patriarchal. The challenge for persons today is to explore the meaning of the Scriptures in such a way as to discern perennial values and meanings in the spirit described by Paul:

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

The Scriptures themselves call for such an approach. "And Ezra read from the Law of God, translating and giving the sense, so that the people understood what was read" (THE JERUSALEM BIBLE, Neh 8:3). Jesus himself assumed a similar approach. Luke pictures Jesus in the synagogue reading from the scroll and then beginning to speak: "This text is being fulfilled today even as you

listen" (THE JERUSALEM BIBLE, Luke 4:21). Like people in the time of Ezra and of Jesus, women have to ask today: How can we understand what is read and how is a text fulfilled even as we listen?

Luke's Gospel is one of the most appropriate texts to help us ask these questions since, more than others, it seems to have been influenced by women and to give women importance.

What perspectives can we use? First, the perspective of the writer or writers of Luke insofar as we can deduce them from the text. Second, we can use the perspective of the implied narrators of the individual story or groups of stories. A third point of view we can draw from those described in Luke 8:2:

> And certain women who were healed from evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, being called Magdalen, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; and Susanna and many others who ministered to them from their possessions.

Ours is not a society that typically believes in evil spirits. So culturally, we have to ask what this meant in Gospel times and what it may mean today.

In Gospel times as now, human beings experience evil and goodness, unexplained addictions and infirmities, evil which seems so destructive that it can be personified. "Demon rum" we may call alcohol out of control. Rollo May writes about our good "demons" and bad "demons," the *personae* we experience within ourselves or others which contradict our expected personalities, and which seem to impel us to certain actions (*Love and Will* [New York: Norton, 1966]).

The implied narrator of Luke 8:2 identifies certain women who in the view of themselves or others experienced evil spirits and infirmities. Mary Magdalen is described as someone from whom seven "demons" had gone out. Since seven is a number of fullness, the implication is that Mary was at the bottom of the ladder of wickedness or oppressed by the fullness of evil.

In other places in the Gospel, however, the phrase describing demons within a person implies what today we call mental illness, and subsequent healing by Jesus refers to persons returning to

mental health or wholeness. If one is suffering from actions which have become destructive, addictions, mental illness, or weakness whether from societal, cultural, or physical causes, how can one be healed? The question is universal. It was important in Gospel times and it is important now.

In Mary Magdalen we have a type with whom many women can identify today. It also seems evident from the text and from the strength of the tradition that many women and men identified with Mary in Gospel times and through the ages. There is recognition of oppression of great proportions so that the person is totally dominated by the "demons," by the evils. And then there is healing and the demons are gone. There is transformation such as we may see in an alcoholic who is reborn, or in a religious conversion.

What about the second woman named Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward? From sources outside the Bible we know a good bit about Herod and his court. Although historically the court was characterized by effective government including the building of cities, from the perspective of Jesus and the early Christians, Herod and his court were profligate, materialistic, and sensual to a fault, oppressors of the common people, and betrayers of the Jewish cause. Would Chuza, Herod's steward, be similarly characterized? Probably. What about Chuza's wife, Joanna? From this text we can picture a woman who must have fit into that governing, upper society, but who heard about Jesus and who was sufficiently converted to follow Jesus and to minister.

"And Susanna, and many others." Wouldn't we love to see these women? What did they look like? How old were they? What were their stories of conversion? They ministered to him or to them out of their possessions. Were some of them well off? Certainly, "possessions" implies more than was needed. We are reminded of Lydia, another woman described by Luke (Acts 16:14). Lydia was a seller of purple dye, so successful that she governed a household and invited Paul, after she and her household were baptized, to remain for a while in her house. It is clear that it is her household. There is no mention of a husband. She "strongly urged" Paul and his companions to remain.

The name Susanna reminds us of the Susanna of the Daniel story who though innocent was accused of adultery because she

refused sexual advances (Dan 13). It is likely there were Gospel women whose experience matched hers. Is this a new Susanna who has found truth and justification in the way of Jesus?

We wonder next if these are real women being named, or is Luke generalizing from his experience and his imagination? Although we have no clear proof one way or the other, we can say that the Mary Magdalen figure is such a strong one in the texts and in the tradition that it is reasonable to conclude that the references point to a strong woman who left her imprint on the Christian story-telling traditions. The "other women ministering" tradition is equally strong. But whatever the particulars of historicality, it is clear that the texts point to women like those described who were an important part of Jesus' story and an important part of the stories of the first Christians.

The placement of this text in Luke is interesting. The narrative begins by telling how Jesus "traveled in every city and village preaching and announcing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him." Then comes the text "And certain women . . . ." In this chapter the traditional twelve men apostles are not named. The phrase "And the twelve were with him" is almost parenthetical! It is very short compared to the enumeration of Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and many others. The reference to the women is followed by a description of a great crowd coming to him, and then the telling of the parable of the sower. After the parable, the "disciples questioned him" (Luke 8:9). We have to ask in the light of the previous descriptions: Are the disciples only the twelve? It does not seem likely.

We have, then, for our reflections a first perspective of the writer or writers of Luke, a second perspective of the implied narrator or narrators of the individual story or groups of stories, and a third perspective of "certain women" who seem important in the unfolding of the text. A fourth perspective is that of women today who bring their own experience to the reading of the good news.

PART ONE:
BEGINNINGS

1

THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

Luke 1

It is from Luke and Matthew that we receive the narratives of the childhood of Jesus, and they represent two sets of traditions. Matthew gives us a genealogy, an account of the birth of Jesus, of the coming of the magi from the East, the flight into Egypt, the part of Herod in the various events, and the importance of how these events fulfilled certain words of the prophets from the Hebrew tradition. Joseph comes through as a chief actor making decisions about Mary and the child: where they should go, where they should live (Matt 1:1–2:23).

In contrast Luke presents the stories which highlight Mary and the child, as well as her cousin Elizabeth and the prophet Anna. Luke begins with an introduction unique to the Gospels. More characteristically Greek than the others, Luke's Gospel opens with an address to the patron "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). Although the word "Theophilus" is masculine, we have to ask if this is an actual patron, or if it refers to a generic "lover of God" which is what the word means, or perhaps if it is both. In the light of the many emphases on women in the Gospel, we ask if this does not also include "Theophila," the woman who is also "lover of God."

Luke refers to many who took in hand to draw up an account concerning the matters which have been fully formed among us.

Who are included in this word "many" (Luke 1:1)? Does Luke have some accounts with which he is familiar and which he is following as he writes? We don't know. Nevertheless, through the ages, readers have recognized the intriguing similarities and dissimilarities with Matthew's Gospel in particular. There is a similar structure and many common narratives, but differences include unexplained divergences such as Matthew's placing certain material in the sermon "on the mount," while Luke places similar teaching sections "on the plain" (Matt 5:1; Luke 6:17). The similarities are so many it is reasonable to presume that Luke includes a version of an early Matthew as one of the accounts to which he refers, or a source that was available to both, including the hypothesized source named Q (from *Quelle,* the German word for source).

Most hypothesize that both Luke and Matthew draw on material found in Mark as well as in Q, so it is also likely that Luke refers to a version of Mark or Q, but what about John? Even here there are puzzling relationships. The writing of John's Gospel in the form we have is usually placed around 80 C.E. or toward the end of the first century while many would place Matthew and Luke in the 60s or 70s. If this is correct, Luke would not have known the John account as we have it; but was he familiar with the perhaps growing oral and even written traditions which culminated in the writing of the Gospel of John? We have much less assurance here.

Were there accounts in the traditions associated with Paul's preaching and writing? Again the overlap, but also the differences between Luke-Acts and Paul's letters are intriguing. In Acts, Luke describes the journeying and preaching of Paul. It is likely that some of the accounts were from the Paul tradition.

There is also an hypothesized tradition that Luke received some of his insights or information from Mary the mother of Jesus. We can offer no textual support here, although Mary is certainly given more detail and prominence in Luke's Gospel than in the others. We have to ask: What is the source of his information or hypothesizing? Did he indeed have an account which somehow had connections with Mary the mother of Jesus? The reader will have to form an opinion.

Whatever the accounts to which Luke is referring, the matters have been handed down from the beginning. The word *"matters"* (Luke 1:1) is interesting. It would be better translated "acts." It is from the same word given as title to the "acts of the apostles." Such acts are active, creating, affecting and effecting reality. Such acts were handed down or delivered to us by those who from the beginning are eyewitnesses, and thereby from those who become eyewitnesses of the Word. Luke includes himself as one following all things accurately from the first, whether this is historically accurate or by assertion.

Who are the other eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word to whom he refers? Certainly some or many of them are women, from whom perhaps come some of the traditions about women which Luke includes in his Gospel.

Why is Luke writing his account? so that Theophilus, the lover of God, and by extension, any reader of the Gospel, may know the certainty of the words "about which you were taught" (Luke 1:4). Words here are not just those sounds by which we communicate, but also those ideas by which we live. It is a life-giving teaching which Theophilus has received.

The Elizabeth-Mary Cycle

In the Elizabeth-Mary stories we have a wonderful structure which weaves together the workings of the Lord in the origins of John, the prophet of the Most High, and of Jesus, the one who will be called Son of God.

The narrative begins with Elizabeth and Zacharias and ends with their son John in the desert. But it is her cousin Mary whom Elizabeth recognizes as the "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Luke acknowledges the strong tradition of John the Baptist and his followers but shows the interconnection between the origins of John and of Jesus and how even from the beginning John's mother acknowledged Mary as the mother of her Lord. John indeed leapt within the womb on hearing Mary's greeting and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41).

The story teller describes for us a husband Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth. Striking is the parallelism of man and woman.

Elizabeth is not subordinated to Zacharias. As Zacharias is priest in the daily schedule of the group of Abia, so Elizabeth is a member of the daughters of Aaron (Luke 1:5). *Abia* refers to one of the divisions of the Temple priesthood as in 1 Chronicles 24:10, while Aaron was the first priest of a priestly line. In other words, Elizabeth as well as Zacharias was of the priestly line. Ordinarily one of a priestly line was expected to marry another of that line. Were these net-working ritualistic and social groups? It is likely. Is a "daughter of Aaron" of "impeccable origins"? Yes.

What about their names? It is not by chance that the woman's name is Elizabeth. *Beth* is house. *Za* suggests gift or life. *El* is lord. An Elizabeth is the house of the gift or life of the Lord in a very homey sense of the home the woman provides for the child both in the womb and in the nurturing to come. In some colloquial modern Hebrew, Elizabeth etymologically is a woman pregnant with child. But Elizabeth is not just an individual pregnant woman. She is a Rachel figure, a mother of a "nation," but not a Rachel who weeps, but rather a Rachel who rejoices.

If the name Elizabeth is so pregnant with meaning, literally, what can we say of the name Zacharias? There is less to go on, but as we unfold the story it will be wise to keep the roots and sounds of *Za* (gift, life, young man?) and *charis* (joy?) as possible clues. Zacharias, "whom God remembers," was also the name of a king of Israel, as well as of several prophets. It is insightful to read the Book of Zacharias [Zechariah] as background for the Lukan story, since it is likely that Luke was familiar with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

At any rate, *both* persons were righteous in the sight of God. They *both* walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. But they did not have a child. Zacharias was sterile and Elizabeth was barren! What an irony the narrator lays before us: a father, a priest, a life-giver who has fathered no child, and a woman who is Elizabeth, house of the life of the Lord, a "pregnant woman" who is sterile! Not only that, but it is too late. *Both* are advanced in years! For the reader who knows the outcome of the story, this is an irony of joy and reversal and of the power and strange ways of God! If Zacharias and Elizabeth are types of Israel, we have also a telling commentary on the lack of fruitfulness of Israel.

In Elizabeth and Zacharias we have the old order of the Jewish traditions. Zacharias according to the custom of the priests goes into the Temple to burn incense. In his view is a messenger, an angel standing at the right of the altar of incense.

Throughout Luke's story the persons confronted by a messenger from God are troubled and fearful. The reader or hearer of the Gospel both then and now may well identify with someone who is fearful as Zacharias is. *"Mē phobou."* "Do not fear" (Luke 1:13) will be a command heard over and over in Luke's Gospel. "Do not be afraid." It is a first step in a call to discipleship.

Zacharias' prayer has been heard. His wife Elizabeth will bear a son and the name will be John, "God is gracious, gifting." And he shall be to you joy *(chara)* and exultation! And many will rejoice *(charēsontai)* over his birth. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:14-15). Many of the sons of Israel will turn to the Lord their God. The old is changing to the new. There will be a change of heart. The disobedient will turn to the wisdom of the just. And all of this will be to prepare a people who are ready for the Lord.

Luke comes from a Greek background and is primarily addressing a Greek audience. What are some images to which persons of Greek culture would relate? Theirs is a culture immediately familiar with temples and with priests and priestesses. The primary god figure of Athens is Athena. The statues of the Acropolis are primarily those of women. At Ephesus, the worshipped god was Artemis whose temple dominated the Acropolis there.

If John will go before the Lord the God of Israel in the spirit and power of Elias, this is not only the prophet Elias who according to Jewish tradition was to precede the coming of the Messiah, but the sounds also connote the name for the sun-god of Greek mythology *(Helios)*. John is the forerunner of the coming of God.

Like most of the other characters whom we meet in Luke, and with whom the reader can identify, Zacharias is full of disclaimers and resistances. He is old *(presbytēs)*, his wife advanced in years. But age is not an excuse! Gabriel brings good news. Gabriel speaks to Zacharias, but Zacharias will not be able to speak until the time is fulfilled. This is an important concept for Luke, the

fulfillment of time, the fulfillment of God's plan, and the fulfillment of expectation.

When they are back home Elizabeth conceives and does not reveal her pregnancy for five months, but in the sixth month, a new series of events begins. Gabriel is sent now to a city of Galilee, Nazareth. From Jerusalem, the capital of Judea and of all the Jewish nation stands for, the scene shifts to the rural north, to a province which is on the edge, which is "off-center," but which paradoxically will become a center because of the conception and life of Jesus.

Although Luke seems less than accurate in his geographical knowledge, he is intrigued all the way through the structuring of Luke-Acts with centers of influence, the shift from one center to another, as well as the continuing enlargement of horizons and world views which such shifts symbolize.

The Virgin at Nazareth

In Nazareth, "a house for the birth of life," Gabriel is sent to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. It is important to note that in the older dispensation Gabriel was sent to the old man Zacharias, and it was his old wife Elizabeth who conceived, but here the roles are reversed. Gabriel is sent to a woman who is very young and who is moreover a virgin, one lacking in experience.

The word used here for virgin (Luke 1:27) is the objective case *parthenon,* from *parthenos;* but *parthenon* is also the name of the Temple of Athena which from the acropolis dominates the city of Athens. Mary is the new temple, a temple not of wealth and dominance, of priests and of rituals, but the new temple of the people, the dwelling place for the person, Jesus.

Although she is betrothed to Joseph of the house of David, this is the only mention of Joseph here. The virgin's name is Mariam or Miriam. Various translations have suggested that the etymology is "bitter waters" or simply "waters," although the Egyptian may also suggest "beloved." The sister of Moses and Aaron, of course, was Miriam. There seems no question that historically, the mother of Jesus was named Mary, but if the name also suggests

"waters," it is appropriate in terms of the breaking of the waters of birth of the new person and of the new life which Jesus will bring, including the waters of the new life in baptism.

Gabriel was sent to Zacharias within the confines of the Temple, and the revelation took place during his privileged once a year ritual. In contrast, Gabriel enters the humble house of the young virgin Mary. The western Church has interpreted "entering" (Luke 1:28) to imply a house, but certain local traditions place the meeting at the well, the source of living water and the center of town life, especially for women. He speaks to her, "Hail." The word is *chaire,* "rejoice," because she is receiving grace and joy. Already, she is blessed, happy, or eulogized among women. Among women, although she is still a young virgin!

Many feminist writers see the highlighting of the role of virgin as anti-woman, lacking an appreciation of the goodness of woman's sexuality. In the context of the culture of the time, however, the concept may have very different connotations. A normal role for woman was as wife and child-bearer. While for many then as now, this role may have been freely chosen and enjoyed, there were also then as now many women for whom either role was oppressive. For such, to be a virgin-prophet was a role to avoid such oppression. Moreover, so many temples dedicated to Athena, the virgin goddess, elevated her to a role which transcended the normal sex role expectations, while at the same time institutionalizing and dehumanizing women as temple prostitutes. In this story, then, Mary is a virgin, radically replacing the accepted virgin Athena. She appears in the simplicity and strength of an autonomous woman from whom the Lord requests a role radically different from the dominant roles in her society. A new concept of virgin as free person has emerged.

No wonder Mary, like Zacharias, is disturbed at the word and wonders what in the world kind of greeting this is. Like Zacharias she is told not to fear. On the contrary, she has found favor (*charis*, "joy") with God. She will conceive in her womb and bear a son.

> "And you will call his name Jesus.
> This one will be great
> and will be called the son of the most high.

> The Lord God will give him
> the throne of David his father
> and he will reign over the house of Jacob to the ages
> and of his kingdom there will not be an end" (Luke 1:31-33).

It is remarkable here that, in contrast to the Zacharias and Elizabeth story, not only is the announcement made to Mary the young virgin, but it is she who will conceive—with no mention of Joseph here—and it is she who will name him Jesus. She is indeed mother of the son of the most high.

But Mary is not naive. In fact, she is a pragmatist: "How will this be since I am not intimate with a man?" It is the Holy Spirit who will come over her. It is the power of the most high that will overshadow her so that the holy one born of her will be called son of God (Luke 1:34-35).

At this point the Mary story is linked again with that of Elizabeth. The cousin has conceived in her old age because no word of God will be impossible (Luke 1:36-37). The reader is called to faith. Just as an old woman can conceive a child, the prophet John, so can the young virgin conceive by the Holy Spirit the child Jesus. Joseph is relegated to the background, mentioned as the one to whom Mary is betrothed, and of the house of David. But it is to Mary that the angel says the child will be given the throne of David, his father.

Mary believes the angel's message. If no word will be impossible with God, she answers the announcement with a formula of loyalty: Behold, indeed, I am the servant *(doulē)* of the Lord.

Doulē is a rich word. It is usually translated servant or slave, so as persons in the modern world we think of it as a demeaning term. In scriptural use it can be servant or slave in the usual sense, but it is also used for that person closest to the sovereign, who is so loyal that she or he will perform the lowliest service out of love, but who also can speak for the other because she is so identified with the other. It is similar to the prime minister who can make treaties and speak for the sovereign.

So Mary is making a statement of great and humble commitment, but she is also acknowledging her power of acceptance and decision. The word *(hrēma)* of God is an act of God which makes

real what it signifies. No word of God is impossible. It is this act to which Mary agrees, and by which she thereby cooperates with God in a new event, a new thrust of the movement of God in the world. The messenger's work is complete. The angel had entered, now the angel departs.

Readers of the Scriptures have typically noted how each of the books is composed of smaller units and structures. Often the structure of a story is revealed by clues of persons, places, or time. This is a good example: The small narrative is opened with Gabriel's being sent and entering; it is concluded with the statement of the angel's departing. This story-telling device is called an *inclusio,* and the story itself is referred to as a *pericope* from the words for "cut around" (*peri*-"around;" *kopē*-"cut"). In other words, a pericope is a piece of the text which can usually be recognized as having a beginning, a development, an ending, and a certain cohesion or integrity within itself.

The Diversity of the Call to Faith

The implied reader is drawn into the story and identifies first with Zacharias and Elizabeth and then with Mary. As each of them is called to faith, so the reader in the Jesus community is called to faith. The implied narrator is saying to the reader: Whether you are old or young, priest, wife, or virgin, the Word of God, the action of God is addressed to you. No word is impossible with God. Whether your world is Jerusalem, the hill country, or Nazareth, God's Word is acting. And you are called to full responsibility, full action with the Word of God. And if you are a woman, whether old or young, you are given more prominence in this unfolding drama.

Mary immediately acts on her new call. She rises up and goes into the hill country with haste (Luke 1:39). The word for "rising up" *(anastasa)* is an interesting one in the Gospel. Although it means a simple physical getting up, it also becomes an almost technical word for the "rising up" of the resurrected new life.

In what ways is Mary "rising up"? On the physical level, she gets up to go into the hill country, but on another level she is rising up to the new life to which she is called. And we may even

ask, is this the rising up to the new life of resurrection in the view of the implied narrator? We may also ask: in what ways is the reader being asked to see Mary as model of the new life, as Elizabeth and Zacharias are models of Israel called into new relationship with the God of action? In what ways is the reader also being called to new life?

Mary goes into the hill country. The place is not named although tradition places Elizabeth and Zacharias' home a short distance west of Jerusalem at Ain-Karim. The hill country is not considered a center of power. It, too, is off-center, on the edge, but it is here that the drama of new life is taking place. Mary greets Elizabeth. The new, the young, greets the old. Nazareth greets Israel (Luke 1:39-40).

A new mother knows and rejoices in the time of "quickening" when she is physically able to recognize the new life within her. The end of the second trimester, the sixth month, is also a special time when the child is clearly on its way, when others begin to rejoice with the mother, when the birth is even more eagerly awaited.

The Power of Hearing

Elizabeth *hears* the greeting of Mary and the baby in her womb leaps (Luke 1:41). "Hearing" *(ēkousen)* is a critical moment in the action of God's Word. God heard Zacharias' request. Zacharias listened to the angel, as did Mary. In this case Elizabeth and her baby hear Mary's greeting, and the one who is to be John, the prophet, leaps in the womb.

At the same time Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and calls out with a great voice (*kraugē megalē*—"a great cry") (Luke 1:42). This is similar to the phrase Luke will use of Jesus on the cross crying out with a great voice his testimony of death transformed into life. It is the sound of the wind (Heb *ruach;* Greek *pneuma*) or spirit of God which rushes into the person and which then lifts up the sound in praise of God.

What does Elizabeth shout? Luke places on her lips a beautiful encomium that is reminiscent of many songs of praise from the Hebrew Scriptures:

> "Blessed and happy are you among women and blessed and happy is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42)

Traditionally, as with so many other verses about women, this has been interpreted as praise of Mary only insofar as she will be mother of the baby to come. Some feminists see this as a put down of Mary or woman as having value only or primarily because she is able to bring forth a man-child. While this is certainly dominant in some traditional interpretations, we should ask at this point whether this is the only way to see the text. It is not.

Mary is pictured here as very young, and as a virgin, but there are clear indications of characteristics often overlooked. As indicated earlier, she is a pragmatist. She does not automatically capitulate to the angel's request. Hers is a considered answer, taken with full responsibility. Her action in setting out—by herself?—for a relatively long trip to her cousin pictures a strong woman. Elizabeth's praise, far from denigrating Mary as woman, praises her among women, in a way that places her with heroes of the Jewish Scriptures: Miriam, Hannah, and Judith. The child would not be except for her. Her womb is not separate from her. It is she, not her womb, that with the spirit is creating the child. It is she who will continue the nourishment, at least until he is legally an adult at age twelve, according to the story which Luke includes in this narrative.

Elizabeth's next words confirm this attitude: how is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me (Luke 1:43)? And it is at the sound of *Mary's* words that the child within Elizabeth leaps to new life. Elizabeth continues by praising *Mary* for *her* faith which is simultaneous with the continuing work and completion of the words spoken to *her* from the Lord.

Mary picks up the song of praise in the beautiful canticle (Luke 1:46-55), which is a psalm of the New Testament. The words and phrases resonate with the language of the songs of praise from the Psalms, with the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10), and with the leadership of women like Miriam, Moses' sister, who sings and leads the song of praise after the escape from the Egyptians (Exod 15:20-21). In some sense, the song certainly seems to be a *Midrash* on such texts. To read Miriam's song and then Hannah's

song, especially in the Greek (Septuagint), opens up the world of which Mary evidently and certainly the teller of Luke's story are part. Such texts are background and indeed were probably read in regular cycles in the synagogues and Christian communities. They help the reader see Mary in line with outstanding women of the biblical tradition.

Although the song has a voice with which persons have identified from Luke's time until now, it is nevertheless a very personal song. It is a song of shouting and exultation. It is in the tradition of Miriam as leader in the community with other women singing and dancing with tambourines to praise the Lord. The first lines are not those of a "shrinking violet" (although in nature violets do not shrink!) The verb for magnifies is *megalynei,* a word associated with great persons and great actions, the stuff of leaders and heroes. "My soul magnifies, leaps up, exults, dances the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

Israel still today has traditions of ecstatic singing dances of praise. We can picture Mary in this tradition. She celebrates and rejoices exceedingly in God her savior. Her humbleness is described by the same word as the saying in Matthew applied by Jesus to himself: "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened . . . and learn from me for I am gentle and *humble* of heart" (Matt 11:28-29). All generations will call her blessed (Luke 1:48). "Blessed" here is one of the *makarisms* in the list of the beatitudes which describe the happiness and the characteristics of Christians in community. As Mary magnifies God, so God magnifies her. His name is holy and his mercy extends to the generations of those dedicated to him. He has lifted up and exalted the *humble* ones.

There are affinities of language with lines from Isaiah 61 which Luke has Jesus apply to himself as a statement of the mission of God through him:

> "The spirit of the Lord is upon me
> because he has anointed me to preach
> good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

If these words announce the mission of God in Jesus, so do the lines of Mary's song announce the mission of God in her and in others who are humble, hungering ones. Such was the promise to

Abraham, the father of faithful ones and to all the children of faith through the ages.

Luke rounds off the pericope with a summary that Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned to her house (Luke 1:56).

Elizabeth as Model of Faith

A woman and a man who are awaiting a birth can relate to Elizabeth and Zacharias waiting the nine months for the fulfillment of a dream. Elizabeth's time is finally fulfilled. She brings forth a son. Most common through the ages has been exactly this kind of birthing: the woman literally brings forth the child. She is procreator. Many earlier societies, indeed, were not always sure of the father or of his part in the process, but there was no doubting that the woman brought forth her child. This time the neighbors magnify the Lord and rejoice with her. Notice that they rejoice with *her*. There is no mention of the father here (Luke 1:57-58).

It is the eighth day, the day of circumcision, the day of the fullness of creation, and the day of rest. The neighbors presume the name of the child will be Zacharias. It is the woman who speaks: No! He shall be called John, for "God is gracious"; the child is gift. The neighbors argue, but taking a tablet, Zacharias the man confirms the woman's announcement. Indeed, the child is gift from God, beyond the natural order of things. Finally, Zacharias can speak again, and he praises God as Elizabeth and Mary already have (Luke 1:59-64). Notice that it is first Elizabeth, the older barren woman, then Mary the young virgin, and finally Zacharias the priest who praises God for the great things which are happening. We have a sequence similar to many others, such as that in the Good Samaritan parable, where the expected sequence is overturned, where the leadership comes from the humble (Luke 10:30-35). All the hill country of Judea is alive with the news. For Luke's readers of faith, the question is posed: What then will this child be (Luke 1:66)?

We have had Elizabeth's short hymn of praise. We have had Mary's longer one. Now finally Zacharias, the representative of Israel, the priest in Judea, can see in faith and speak in prophecy:

Indeed blessed is the Lord God of Israel because he has already visited and worked redemption in his people. He has already freed them. He has raised up the source of fertility and salvation in the house of David his servant. The promise to Abraham has been fulfilled (Luke 1:68-75).

We are somewhat surprised that the extravagant praise refers not directly to the birth of Jesus, but to the birth of John, later to be called the Baptist. Here we have echoes perhaps of the difficult debate between the followers of the Baptist and the followers of Jesus, which while it was smoothed over and reconciled polemically in the Gospels, nevertheless remained problematic at least throughout the first century. Some loyal followers of John, in fact, never accepted Jesus, although John is pictured by the Gospel writers as accepting and pointing to Jesus.

However, as Luke places the hymn, the context proclaims the fulfillment of the covenant promised to Abraham. John will be the prophet who will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways (Luke 1:76). By the time of the writing of Luke, and against the background of the meditative reading of the Greek Scriptures (Septuagint), there is a conflation of lord, *kyrios,* to refer not only to the God of the Jewish Scriptures (as a translation for *Yahweh* or *Adonai*), but also to Jesus as *kyrios,* lord in faith, and one with the Lord named in the Hebrew story. There will be forgiveness, and the Dayspring will visit or come to see us for the purpose of comfort and strength (Luke 1:78). The word translated "Dayspring" opens up worlds of meaning. THE JERUSALEM BIBLE even translates it "the rising Sun." *Anatolē* is a rising of the sun, the place of rising, or the dawn. The verb means "to cause to rise, to rise, as of the sun or stars, as well as to spring by birth."

For a Greek audience, this recalls the sun-god, the Helios of the cause of light and life. This "rising Sun" will appear to those in darkness and to those sitting in a shadow of death "in order to guide our feet into a way of peace." A way is not only a road, but a way of life, a way of discipleship, of following a master and becoming one with the master of life.

Luke rounds off the birth story of John by a summary that the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts until he appeared openly to Israel (Luke 1:80).

This cycle of stories, then, is unique in a number of ways. A character of dominance is given to two women, Elizabeth and Mary. In contrast to the men in their relationships, they more readily understand the work of God. They are the prime ones selected by the messenger of God. They are the ones who act on the understanding given to them. Structurally, the stories are interwoven in a tightly knit set of interrelationships. In contrast, we do not see the same kind of tight structural cycle coherence in other parts of Luke.

Did this cycle of stories come from a women's group who meditated on these events? Do we detect the mouth or hand of another writer, who almost in the style of a tightly knit series of songs, tells of these two women at the beginning of the story of Jesus who stand as models of faith for those beginning their stories? If indeed these stories are *Midrash* or commentary on similar texts in the Hebrew Bible, how did these two women emerge as such heroes in the Christian story? At present, we can only hypothesize such sources.

Thus, whatever his sources, we have in the first chapter of Luke an interweaving of the stories of Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias with that of Mary as a narrative of the interweaving of the stories of John and the Jesus to come, and as a sequence of stories of women who act. As symbolically representing the covenants and the history which precede Jesus, Zacharias, sterile all his life, is a priest who recognizes the coming of a new day and exults in it. Elizabeth, barren all her long life, finds that with God all things are possible in faith. As house of the Lord, as home of Israel, she brings forth the prophet John who will be prophet of the new day in Jesus.

Mary, the young woman on the threshold of adulthood, is acknowledged by Israel to be blessed among women. She is the center of those stories. She rises as a woman of faith who is practical, who can make decisions and respond to God's call, who can go forth into the hill country and return to her own town, and who can sing and perhaps dance a mighty song of praise of the God who will be light for those who are in darkness and life to those who are in the shadow of death.

2

BIRTH NARRATIVES

Luke 2

A comparison of the birth of Jesus stories from Matthew and Luke raises many puzzling questions. What sources are they using? Why does Matthew provide the story of the wise men from the East, but Luke provide the story of the shepherds from nearby east of Jerusalem? We don't know, but we can say from our vantage point, that Matthew makes Joseph the man a primary actor. Joseph plans to divorce Mary because he is a just man! We do not detect the input of a woman here! An angel provides comfort to *Joseph,* with no mention of comfort for Mary! It is Joseph who is cautioned not to fear to take Mary for his wife. What about Mary's fears? As so often is true through the ages and today, it is presumed that the woman is the guilty one. Mary has nothing to do with the conception—"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son" (Matt 1:20-21), but it is Joseph the man who will call his name Jesus. The reason for this set of circumstances is to fulfill the words of a male prophet who foretold of a virgin who would bear a child (Matt 1:23). How different from Luke's description of the request made to Mary and of her responsibility in considering and embracing the Word.

In the parallel situation Luke provides the broad perspective of a world census (Luke 2:1). The rulers named, Augustus and Cyrenus, are symbolic of the peace mentioned in Zacharias' song. Luke here shifts the action to Joseph. We wonder why. In Luke's

view, or historically, was it the male who was required to register? We have no indication other than from Luke of this census. The purpose of the ancient census, however, is helpful here. It was to provide a basis for the levy of taxes and also for military service. Perhaps Luke is making a case for Joseph and Mary as descendants of David, as well as for the birth of Jesus in the city of David, Bethlehem, the "House of Bread."

Mary Brings Forth a Child

After this statement, however, Luke does shift the action to Mary. Here in Bethlehem, the days are fulfilled for her to bring forth her child (Luke 2:6). It is surprising to a woman that the verb *tekein,* which means "lovingly to bring forth a child," is usually translated by the passive "to be delivered," which implies no action or human responsibility on the part of the woman. The English translation seems inadequate and misleading besides, not to mention anti-life and anti-woman.

"To be delivered" today has not only connotations of oppression or negativity, but also notions of thingness. But even in that connotation, we can acknowledge the aspect of freedom also suggested by the word. Today, however, we prefer an oppressed person or persons to take action for their own freedom, and not to depend helplessly on a deliverer. Although a woman giving birth may feel freed from the restricting aspects of being pregnant, "to be delivered" still does not imply any action or responsibility on her part in the process! THE JERUSALEM BIBLE at least shifts the action from the passive: "While they were there the time came for her to have her child," but "have her child" misses the activity of the woman implied both by the verb as well as by the common experience of many women, especially the poor, who actually bring forth their own children.

She lovingly brought forth her first-born child. The first-born is not only first by reason of being the first child of the mother, but is also thereby the leader of a spiritual family. Mary "swathed" the baby: she herself wrapped him in the binding cloths of the time, which were the cultural means of attempting to provide

safety, cleanliness, and warmth. She laid the baby in a manger since there wasn't room for them in the inn.

How many women through the centuries and today can relate to this poignant story of rejection. As woman, she brings forth the child and provides for the child within the means of her own responsibility. (Although tradition has placed Joseph nearby in a protective stance, and we have no reason to dispute the tradition, Luke does not tell about Joseph here.) Luke tells the story of the woman Mary. It is a troubling question in a way: where is Joseph? Whatever the possible answers, it is clear that the narrator is telling a story which gives center place to a woman.

The Shepherds Come

The next pericope is the story of the shepherds (Luke 2:8-16). From the first scene in the Temple at Jerusalem to the humble house in Nazareth, from the priestly home in the Judean hills to the manger in Bethlehem, Luke has been showing the reader the settings and the persons to whom the good news is addressed. The scene shifts once again, this time to the countryside and to the shepherds.

What questions can we ask about the shepherds? Tradition has pictured them as men, but Genesis and Exodus both describe women and daughters as shepherding flocks. Given that centuries separate those books from the writings of Luke, we nevertheless have to ask if the group does not include women and perhaps girls. The story of the shepherds is certainly in contrast to Matthew's story of the magi, although both come from the East, the first from nearby, the latter from afar (Matt 2:1-12). Each represents the outside. For Matthew those from the East are powerful. For Luke, they are common people, even poor.

In Matthew's story, magi are perhaps members of a Persian priestly caste. Inquiry is made of Herod the king, who assembles priests and scribes, all men. In contrast, in Luke's story shepherds are living in the fields. Whatever the richness or poverty of their situation, theirs seems to be a simpler situation by far. An angel had told Zacharias, then Mary, not to fear; now a similar angel

tells the shepherds not to fear. Whatever your caste, the implied narrator is saying, do not fear. All previous announcements seem secondary to this one: "I announce to you a great joy which will be to all the people because a savior who is Christ the Lord is born for you in a city of David" (Luke 2:10-11). The knowledge is being made public. The announcement is to the people.

Structurally, Luke has led the reader immediately to the universal theme that this savior is for all. The sign (*sēmeion,* a sign which effects what it signifies; Luke 2:12) of this universality is that the baby will be wrapped in the common binding cloths and will be lying in the manger of the poor. This savior is not someone removed from them. This savior shares the fullness of their humanity. His "army" is that of a group praising God in terms of glory to God, peace, and goodwill (Luke 2:13-14).

The shepherds decide to go to see the sign which the Lord has made known to them. The implied reader who is called to faith and discipleship through the same good news is called to the same kind of decision. Do not fear, but go and see what has happened. They hasten and they find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger.

Luke surprises us: they find Mary *and Joseph.* It is as though he wants to make the picture complete; or someone asked: Where is Joseph? Even more interesting is the fact that Matthew pictures the magi going into the house and seeing "the child with Mary his mother" (Matt 2:11). No mention of Joseph. Whatever the reason for Luke's including the mention of Joseph here, the scene continues with the interaction between the shepherds and all those who are hearing this marvelous word. The narrator continues that Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19).

She had much for pondering *(symballousa).* What did all these words and events symbolize? The implied reader is brought within the intimacy of the experience to raise the same question. And if the implied reader also knows the outcome of the story, the richness of the levels of meaning leads the hearer into a journey of faith parallel with that of Mary and the shepherds, who return glorifying and praising God at all they heard and saw, "as was spoken to *them*" (Luke 2:20).

When eight days were completed for the circumcision, his name was called Jesus as the angel had indicated (Luke 2:21).

The scene shifts again back to the Temple and to a man and woman who in some ways are doublets for the earlier Zacharias and Elizabeth—Simeon and Anna. Simeon (Luke 2:25) too is an old man, upright and devout, and already the Holy Spirit was with him. The sounds of his name also suggest *sēmeion,* or "sign" as the shepherds had described it. He had already understood from the Spirit that he would not see death before he would see the Christ of the Lord, the Messiah.

Like Simeon, Anna (Luke 2:36) is old, eighty-four years in fact. She is a prophet, was married for seven years, and now as a widow lives in the Temple serving God by fasting and praying. (It was Anna or Hannah who was mother of Samuel and who is pictured as singing the canticle to which Mary's song has likenesses). So we seem to have parallels to Zacharias and Elizabeth, parallels who see the Messiah and confirm his coming.

Mary Brings Jesus to the Temple

With this background prepared, Luke tells us that, in order to fulfill the law of Moses, "they" took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Luke 2:22). The presumption is that "they" refers to the parents since later on in the story it is the parents who are bringing the child when Simeon takes the child in his arms and sings that indeed

> "Now this servant *(doulon)* can be released in peace
> because his eyes have seen the salvation of God,
> prepared before the face of all peoples,
> a light for revelation to the nations
> and glory for God's people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

This time it is the "father and mother of him" (Luke 2:33) who are marveling at the things being said about the child. Simeon blesses or praises them, but then he speaks to Mary the mother a saying which has been enigmatic through the centuries: "Behold, this one is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel

and for a sign *(sēmeion)* which shall be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). There is no doubt the implied narrator is pointing to the rejection and rising which will be the highlight of the unfolding story. The sign is a two-edged sword, so that as persons accept or reject Jesus, the dialogue of faith or lack of faith, acceptance or lack of acceptance will effect what it signifies. Injected in the text is the saying: "Yes, a sword will pierce your own soul also" (Luke 2:35).

Tradition places Mary not only at the cross, but at least nearby in the conflicting events that unfold in her son's life. Here is a woman who as mother suffers with her son and because of her son, a woman with whom many could identify in a time when the message of the Christ brought about divisions between family members. The same, of course, is true through the ages, including our own times.

It is important to note that here it is still Mary a woman who is the central figure. Obviously, the story is pointing to the story of Jesus, but Mary is the one who is acting, who is being addressed, who is being named.

Luke provides an *inclusio* to summarize that they had finished all things according to the law of the Lord, so they return to Galilee, to their city of Nazareth. The child (*paidion,* one who is learning) grew and became strong being filled with wisdom *(sophia)* and grace *(charis)* was upon him. Both "wisdom" and "grace" are feminine words (Luke 2:40).

Using pre-Pauline hymns (Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Col 1:15-20; Eph 2:14-16; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:18, 22; John 1:1-14) Elisabeth Fiorenza develops an extensive study of the tradition which associates Christ and wisdom, drawing on the wisdom theology prevalent in Jewish, Hellenistic, and mystery religions of the first century (Fiorenza, 188 ff.). The clue opens up facets of the feminine important in an understanding of the way readers of Luke might perceive not only Jesus but also God. In Hebrew and Aramaic, words for the spirit of God, the wisdom of God and the presence *(shekinah)* of God are feminine. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Christ is God's power and wisdom, so that associated with the wisdom from God, Christ transcends male and female to be one with God.

In various middle eastern traditions of God, the deity transcends male and female, often embodying both. The young male Egyptian King Tut was sculpted as also having breasts. For the Christians brought forth by Paul:

> You are all children of God
> by faith in Christ Jesus,
> for as many as were baptized into Christ
> have put on Christ.
> There cannot be Jew nor Greek,
> there cannot be slave nor free,
> there cannot be male and female
> for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28).

Fiorenza persuasively points out (208ff.) that, for Jew/Greek and slave/free, there is a neither/nor distinction, whereas the "no male and female" indicates a breaking out of the oppressive aspects of gender and role parameters characteristic of patriarchal marriage and family roles. In no way is this phrase a denial along the lines of Gnostic tendencies which were recognized as aberrations of the sexuality of an individual. Rather, the words are a call to freedom in Christ, as well as a proclaiming of a God who is neither male nor female but who nevertheless is described in anthropological terms since there are no others available to human beings. Such proclaiming of a God in terms of spirit, wisdom, and presence gives priority to feminine language, images, and concepts.

For Luke to say, then, that the child as disciple and learner grew and became strong and was filled with wisdom implies an orientation to a tradition whose language is feminine and whose teacher, it is reasonable to conjecture, was Mary, a woman. "And the grace *(charis)* of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Such grace or favor is in the same nurturing tradition of personified wisdom.

In the next pericope (Luke 2:41-52) Jesus enters into adulthood. The story is still told however from the point of view of the parents. They are still the chief actors and observers, and Mary is still the spokesperson. The first dialogue of Jesus with anyone is a dialogue with Mary, a woman.

Luke says that the child's parents went to Jerusalem every year for the celebration of the passover (Luke 2:41). When the boy be-

came twelve, a number of fullness, as well as the legal age for entering into adulthood, they went up and fulfilled the days, but now the separation begins. Jesus, though still a boy, remains in Jerusalem without the parents' knowledge, even though they are returning home. Although the reader may well be surprised that the parents did not seem careful enough in checking or being aware of their son's absence, the point of the narrator is that Jesus is entering into a new stage of his journey. The division and separation foreshadowed in Simeon's song, and characteristic, we may add, of any child traversing the boundary into adulthood, are thrust center stage. It is a division and separation which will characterize the experience of those who follow Jesus, whether in his lifetime, in the days of the first Christians, or in the experience of those today who strive to be followers of Jesus.

Jesus is not found among the kinfolk and acquaintances. This foreshadows his rejection by his own. The parents return therefore to Jerusalem seeking him. They find him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the teachers both listening to them and asking them questions. They are surprised at his intelligence and his answers. Mary had taught him well! It is no wonder the parents are also surprised. The mother says to the child: "Why have you acted this way? Your father and I are greatly distressed while we have been looking for you" (Luke 2:48). The mother, the woman, speaks for both.

The son's answer is enigmatic. So many sons' answers are! The son must be about his father's work (Luke 2:49). What is the narrator of Luke saying? That even his parents Joseph and Mary did not understand him? That Jesus transcended the boundaries and bonds of expected familial relationships and obligations? That Jesus early indicated an experience of a unique relationship with God as his perceived father, and that his call was to the work of that father? Nevertheless, at this point, he went back with them to Nazareth and was subject to them.

How many early readers of Luke could also identify with Jesus who perceives his call as different from the expectations of society. But also how many could identify with the parents, and especially the mother, who tells her son how distressed she and her husband are while they are seeking him.

Luke rounds off this narrative by putting the mother once more at center stage: His mother carefully kept all these words in her heart (Luke 2:51). It is this line on which is built the tradition that Mary was the source for these stories which Luke tells. It certainly is possible. Whatever the source or sources, Luke provides the points of view of Elizabeth, Anna, and Mary in a way that is unique in the Gospels, and that puts these women and especially Mary at the center of the drama as it begins.

How can we account for this uniqueness? We can attribute it to Luke's creativity or to his distinctive sources. We can also hypothesize the existence of individuals or groups of women who met together, in Jesus' lifetime, as well as or in the days after his death and entrance into new life, who treasured such stories, who meditated in the manner of *Midrash* on their reading of the Scriptures, and who told the stories in a way to give them life and to give life and hope to other women as well as men. Fiorenza as well as others describe house churches in which such women met, prayed, and presided, and we can add, told the stories.

A careful reading of the first two chapters in Luke makes it clear that we have a structure which has preserved several cycles of women's stories. It becomes even clearer in contrast to the next part of the narrative which, beginning with the Baptist, parallels the other Synoptic Gospels in telling the story of the public mission of Jesus.

PART TWO:
EARLY CALL AND DISCIPLESHIP

1

THE PUBLIC LIFE BEGINS

Luke 3

The underlying structure of each of the Gospels begins with the Baptist as preparation for the mission of Jesus. The similarities point to a very early and consistent tradition, as well as to the historical validity of the preaching of John. Each of the Gospel writers describes John's coming to prepare the way of the Lord as fulfillment of the words of Isaiah, but Luke's account is distinctive in setting the scene in historical context by placing it in the fifteenth year of Caesar's reign and by listing various other rulers of the time.

What is surprising is the radical shift from the point of view we had in the infancy narratives. From a cycle of stories emphasizing women we move to a narrative which summarizes the mission of John the Baptist, which makes clear his part in the fulfillment of God's will in the coming of Jesus, and which underlines the point that, while he was important, John was only predecessor of Jesus. He was only pointing the way. John is son of Zacharias. Elizabeth is not mentioned here. Has Luke shifted to a new source for the telling of the story? Apparently. Certainly the implied narrator is different.

John preached a baptism of penance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). The valleys shall be filled up, and the mountains laid low. The crooked places will be straight, and the rough ways smooth, and all flesh will see the salvation of God. Crowds went out to be baptized by him. Did these crowds include women?

Were Mary Magdalen, Joanna, and Susan here at this early point? If not, were there other women like them who were followers of the Baptist? Did some of them remain loyal to the Baptist and refuse to recognize Jesus? Did others recognize John as precursor but later move their allegiance to Jesus? Certainly, some women experienced the oppression of sin and felt the need for forgiveness and repentance. The various stories of women testify to that. No doubt, their curiosity and hope were also aroused, and they, too, came to listen to the Baptist in the hope of a new life.

John excoriates those who rely on their cultural heritage as children of Abraham without producing fruits worthy of repentance. On the contrary, out of the stones God can raise children to Abraham (Luke 3:8). Such will be children of faith, and will include women as well as children and men. (In the parallel passage in Matthew [3:7-10], this saying is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming for baptism.) The tree which does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire. The crowds respond: What can we do then?

The next saying is unique to Luke: "The one (It is noteworthy that almost all the versions translate the subject as "the man." In spite of the fact that the pronoun is masculine, "the one" is still a preferable translation.) who has two tunics, let that one give to the one who does not have. The one who has foods, let that one do likewise" (Luke 3:11). It seems that the women listeners and followers were ones who took such a saying to heart, who did follow, and did share of their possessions. Luke follows with reference to tax collectors and soldiers who also ask what they should do. The answer is almost a polemic from Luke about not upsetting societal structures. "Don't collect more than is appointed." "Don't rob by violence. Be content with your wages" (Luke 3:13-14).

The people argue then about whether John is the Christ, but the four Gospel traditions are consistent in presenting John's rebuttal and humility. He baptizes with water, but according to Luke and Matthew, there will come one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John had reproved Herod because he married his brother's wife, Herodias, and according to Luke, because he did other evil things. In this chapter this reference to the brother's wife is the

only mention of a woman. But we are reminded of the women mentioned in chapter 8, including Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. Did Joanna know Herodias? Was she part of the court when this was happening? What were the events in Joanna's life which led her to follow Jesus? Was she a source in some way of the traditions which became part of the Gospel?

It is only Luke who places the baptism of Jesus in the context of a large group of people coming to John to be baptized. However, if we do picture such a group, we know it would have included women. Even if we picture Jesus alone being baptized in this scene, women no doubt would have been part of the crowd. Luke pictures the heavens being opened and the Holy Spirit symbolized as a dove (Luke 3:22).

"Spirit" *(pneuma)* is feminine both in its gender as well as in the tradition associated with wisdom. "Dove" symbolizes gentleness, as well as love, and in Hebrew is the word *jonah.* Do we have here a resurrection motif, since Jonah emerging from the darkness of the whale was seen as an image of Jesus emerging from the darkness of the tomb?

The voice from heaven is the oracular, associated by a Greek audience with those temples of Athena and Artemis, where the voice was often that of a priestess. The voice or sound, also linguistically feminine, confirms the mission of Jesus: You are my loved *(agapētos)* son. I am well pleased in you. So although Jesus is called son since he is masculine, and although the tradition pictures the voice and confirmation as associated with a God the father figure, the imagery, on the contrary, is all feminine except for the word *God* in Matthew's phrase "the spirit of God" *(theou).* Linguistically and literally, the approval is feminine.

The following confirmation is consistent: And Jesus himself, beginning at about thirty years, and being son *as it was supposed* of Joseph,—at which point Luke provides his version of the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:23-38), a genealogy often associated with the woman Mary.

2

JESUS IS TEMPTED

Luke 4

The temptation story of chapter 4 is noteworthy for the mention of the spirit in each of the first two clauses (Luke 4:1. In parallel structure, Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit (a feminine image) from the Jordan, was led by the Spirit into the desert. He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. Mark had used the word "satan" here, a court term which usually means adversary or prosecutor (Mark 1:13). Luke and Matthew instead have used *diabolos* (Luke 4:2; Matt 4:1). Although some suggest that the New Testament does not distinguish between these terms, *diabolos* perhaps adds the connotation of tearing apart.

At any rate, the dialogue is a disputation, almost a miniature narrative along the lines of the story of Job whom God allowed to be tempted by the satan. Like the story of Job, the temptation is placed in the context of the mysterious work of the Spirit. The adversary attacks in three areas, first the area of bread for the hungry, second, the glory of authority, and third, a presumption on a false security in God. In each case, Jesus rebuffs the temptation with a counter argument from Scripture. The *diabolos* withdraws "until a season, or time" (*kairos,* a favorite word of Luke). Then Jesus returns in the power of the *spirit (dynamei tou pneumatos)* to Galilee from the wilderness (Luke 4:14).

How would those women followers of Jesus relate to such a story? Although it is a male story, with no mention of a woman,

these are temptations, which while they are specific to a Messiah, are nevertheless easily universalized. The kind of discipleship to which the Gospel narrative is leading is one that must be free of the domination of material things, as well as of power, and of a false security in God. These were temptations and problems with which the early Christian communities were familiar.

It is surprising, then, that women are not pictured in the Gospels as vulnerable to these kinds of temptations while, in contrast, story after story emphasizes the inclinations of various men, including the Twelve, for whom these were common temptations. Are we to infer that these were not problems for the women followers of Jesus? Hardly.

As part of another type of argument, Fiorenza shows that in some Christian communities women posed the problem of wanting to be supported without assuming responsibility for contributing to the common good. In many cases, their assertiveness is a threat to male, patriarchal, or social authority. Her purpose is to indicate the freedom which women apparently found in following the way of Jesus. But it seems to me, we may also read between the lines to infer that women as leaders were subject to temptations similar to those described for Jesus. As women becoming disciples, they were also being called not to submit to such temptations but to realize that for Jesus, as well as for them, these might be part of the large picture of the work of the Spirit. As women with possessions and ministering to Jesus and others, the women named in chapter 8 would probably not have been impervious to such temptations. Nevertheless, they are pictured not as vulnerable to temptation but as appropriately ministering from their material goods and from their positions.

Jesus Preaches in the Synagogue

Luke summarizes that the fame of Jesus spread throughout the countryside, that he taught in the synagogues, and that he was glorified by all (Luke 4:15). What questions can we ask about these synagogues, in terms of the place of women in Luke's Gospel?

Synagogues were places of assembly, where the community gathered to study, to pray, and to take care of common concerns. In the time of Luke's Gospel, men and women may have been divided by a short wall, men on one side, women on the other, although in later development, women were often relegated to galleries or to the rear. In the former arrangement, women then would have formed possibly half of the group, hearing the readings and exposition by the rabbi or a guest.

Luke's narrative of the preaching of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth is quite distinct from that of Mark and Matthew, although a comparison raises challenging questions (cf. Matt 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30). Luke pictures Jesus having returned to his home town standing up to read the beautiful quotation from Isaiah:

> "The spirit of the Lord is upon me
> because he has anointed me
> to preach good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim
> release to the captives and sight to the blind,
> to free those who are oppressed,
> to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord" (Isa 61:1-2;
> Luke 4:18-19).

It is interesting to identify first with the women who in Jesus' time may have heard him make such a proclamation. How many of these women were poor, spiritually if not materially? How many were hungry for good news? How many could identify with captives needing release and with blind needing sight? Certainly many were oppressed, in their families, in their society. What would be this year of favor, of rightness from the Lord? We can picture the impact such a teacher would have on these women.

In a similar way we can identify with the women of Luke's time who would hear such a proclamation as a call to enter the way of following Jesus, women who had their own lived experiences of poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression.

Whatever the origin of the story, we can empathize with their surprise at his power and strength: "And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say . . .

This day this scripture is fulfilled in your ears, and all bore witness to him and marveled at the words of grace proceeding out of his mouth" (Luke 4:20-22).

At this point Mark and Matthew describe the people asking: "Where did this man get this wisdom? Isn't he the carpenter's son?" (Matt 13:55) "Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary, brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). Luke does not mention: carpenter, Mary, brothers, or sisters. Is he being consistent with saying that Jesus was son of a virgin and therefore omitting potentially controversial description? Or does he reflect a different tradition here?

For whatever reason, after omitting this mention of women—Mary and his sisters,—he then cites examples from Jewish tradition of prophets being sent to the unexpected, to the marginal, even to a widow. Although there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elias *(Eliou)* and a great famine, the prophet nevertheless was sent to a widow outside of Israel, in the land of Sidon, a land associated with sinfulness. And in the time of Elisha the prophet, although there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha was sent to cleanse, not a leper from Israel, but Naaman from Syria (Luke 4:25-27).

Moreover, it was a young maiden or a little girl who had been captured from Israel and who was serving Naaman's wife. She was the one who told Naaman's wife about the prophet in Samaria who could heal leprosy. The eventual washing served as a source of healing and of revelation to someone from outside Israel (2 Kgs 5:1-19). Moreover, among the few persons mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures as having "leprosy," are Moses (Exod 4:6ff.) and his sister Miriam (Num 12:10ff.), who are miraculously cured.

For the early Christians the story of Naaman as someone in faith following the apparently illogical direction of the prophet to wash in an ordinary river and thus be healed became a paradigm of the baptismal washing. "No prophet is acceptable in his native place"—even a prophet who will bring healing. In contrast to Naaman are the unbelievers who will say "Physician, heal yourself!" (Luke 4:23-24).

Everyone in the synagogue is enraged, and they rise up to put him out of the city (Luke 4:28-29). Unfortunately, the narrative

gives us no reason for excluding any women who were in the synagogue from also being enraged and from being in the group who are casting him out. The thrust of this narrative contradicts that of the infancy narratives. Why would Luke not at least mention Mary here, even if he wishes to leave out the sisters? And if those are left out, why intrude the reference to the widow from Sidon and the Syrian leper? We see here Luke's emphasis on the marginal. Discipleship is not based on Jewish inheritance, nor on familial rights, but on the new sister and brother relationship in Jesus. Even Mary the mother of Jesus will not be an exception here.

Jesus Begins His Healing Ministry

It is to Capernaum (Luke 4:31) then that Jesus transfers his base, and indeed his teaching there seems to make an impression. In fact, precisely in the synagogue does Jesus begin his healing ministry, so that even from within the synagogue a demon spirit can paradoxically witness to Jesus: "I know who you are, the holy one of God" (Luke 4:34). Jesus rebukes the demon, so that the possessed man is healed, although the tradition says only that the demon came out and did not hurt the man. Everyone recognizes the authority *(exousia)* and power *(dynamis)* Jesus has over unclean spirits.

To the healing of a man, Luke juxtaposes the healing of a woman, Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38). Too often in the tradition which gave dominance to the male and to patriarchy by the end of the century, this story became peripheral and anti-feminist in the sense that it was almost a footnote to a narrative that gave Peter precedence. We have to step back, try to see what is happening in the text as well as in the redaction or editorial work, and ask some questions.

Luke had pictured Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, claiming the words of Isaiah for himself: "The spirit of the Lord is upon him" (Luke 4:18). Then Nazareth had rejected him (4:29). Now, by contrast, Capernaum, the Hellenized town but also the location of a major synagogue, welcomes him, is impressed, and witnesses his casting out of a demon, precisely from within a syn-

agogue of Israel (4:31-36). The next scene is Simon's house (4:38-39). Simon, later called Peter, had not been mentioned earlier in Luke, although Mark and Matthew place the call of the disciples before this healing (Mark 1:29-34; Matt 8:14-17). The presumption of the implied narrator in Luke is that the audience knows who Simon is and knows that he has a wife and a mother-in-law, but we can see Luke's point of view in placing the healing of a woman right at the beginning and in parallel to the man in the synagogue.

What would this house have been like? Although the on-going extensive excavations at the "traditional" place for "Peter's house" on Galilee do not, in the view of most at the present, point to a first-century Peter, they, nevertheless, do provide physical evidence for picturing a Galilean house that was fairly substantial in size. The work of Fiorenza and others working only with the texts also opens up for us a picture of a house which provided living and working space for a number of people. It is reasonable, in fact, to suggest that the house was that of the mother-in-law, although she remains unnamed. The problem is not only that a relative is sick, but that, in addition, the organization of the house has lost its director. It is likely that this woman was respected as the head of the *materfamilias* situation, with all the relationships of preparing food, welcoming guests, and arranging for supplies. The woman has been seized with a great fever; the whole house is thrown into consternation.

These two verses (Luke 4:38-39), especially in comparison with the parallels, pose fascinating questions. Mark pictures Jesus entering "the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John" (Mark 1:29). In Matthew, Jesus enters Peter's house (Matt 8:14), but in Luke, Jesus enters Simon's house. They all agree that the mother-in-law was sick with a fever. No wonder everyone entreats Jesus to do something. He does. He stands over her, rebukes the fever, and it leaves her. She rises up and ministers to them.

This small pericope begins with the word for rising up (*anastas;* Luke 4:38). Jesus rises up from the synagogue *(synagōgēs)* and enters into the house of Simon. The leader of the house is seized *(synechomenē)* with a great fever *(pyretō).* She is burning up. We have echoes of a ritual of healing in the words which describe

Jesus leaning over her, rebuking the fever, and the fever departing. At once rising up *(anastasa)* she ministered *(diēkonei)* to them (or him, in Matthew). This woman, head of a household, is healed by Jesus, rises up to new life, and ministers to the community. We certainly have an image of resurrection and new life in Jesus, as well as the ministering of *diakonia*.

The next verses (Luke 4:40-44) summarize the direction of the narrative. All who were sick were brought to him, and putting his hands on them, he healed them and also cast out demons. The next day he goes to a lonely place, but he is found. Nevertheless, he tells those who find him that he must go to other cities: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." Although they are not named, some of the persons healed were no doubt women. Do they follow him to the other cities? It seems likely.

In his narrative Luke has led us from the synagogue where Jesus had announced that the spirit of the Lord had been given to him, through the various ritual healings, to a setting in the house of Peter's mother-in-law, to a lonely place, and now on to the other cities to which he is also called. Whereas Matthew and Mark say he went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, Luke says he preached in the synagogues of Judea which furthers Luke's purpose of geographically and symbolically enlarging the circles of Jesus' message and ministry (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44).

3

THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

Luke 5

This is another narrative in which Luke gives a distinctive twist. In common with the other Gospel writers, Luke tells of Jesus preaching and then calling the first disciples. But Luke weaves in the special story of Peter's call to faith which has similarities to the post-resurrection account at the end of John's Gospel (Luke 5:1-11; cf. John 21:1-19). Luke's use of three words, lake *(limnēn),* nets *(diktua),* and deep *(bathos)* (Luke 5:1, 2, 4), as well as the structure of the dialogue, raises interesting questions.

A crowd is pressing in on Jesus to hear *(akouein)* the Word *(logon)* of God *(theou)* (Luke 5:1). Jesus is "standing by the lake" of Gennesaret. He sees two boats also "standing by the lake," but the fishers had gone away and were washing the nets. Nevertheless, Jesus gets into the boat which belongs to Simon, and asks him to go out a little from the land. Sitting, Jesus teaches the crowds.

In this introductory narrative, the language suggests not a careless description, but the context of a teacher with authority offering a way of life. Jesus, the boats, Simon, and the crowd are all on the edge of the lake. For Luke and his Greek audience the word "lake" would have meant a large pool of standing water as well as a lake. In Athens *limnai* named a quarter of the city near the Acropolis in which stood the Lenaeum, and the *Lenaea* was an

Athenian festival held in the month of the same name, in honor of Bacchus, the god of the wine-press. One wonders if in Luke's time this lake was used for Christian baptizing.

The narrative then zeroes in on Simon in a dialogue which is a call to faith:

> "Simon, put out into the depths *(bathos)*
> and let down your nets for a catch *(agran)*, a gathering."
>
> Simon answers:
>
> > "Master," (In Athens, this word meant not only "master" but also "chief presider of the *ecclesia,* or gathering")
> > "through the whole night we have labored and taken nothing,
> > but on your instruction I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:4-5).

The narrative now introduces "they," presumably Simon's associates who let down the nets and enclose a multitude of fish, so much so that the nets will be torn unless they call their partners in the other boat to help them. Still there are so many fish, the boats seem to be sinking.

Simon, now also named Peter in some of the texts, falls at the knees of Jesus in a classic posture of commitment, saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." They are all astonished at the catch or gathering *(agra)* of the fish *(ichthyōn)*. The text adds "and also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were sharers *(koinōnoi)* with Simon" (Luke 5:8-10).

Jesus says to Simon the classic formula: "Do not fear. From now on you will be making human beings alive!" (Luke 5:10). Strange as that sounds in English, that is the sense of the early Christian understanding of new life in Christ.

Where do women fit into such a picture? If women took part in fishing in Galilee or Greece, we do not have records or images. Fishers are ordinarily male. However, we have already indicated that women were certainly part of the crowd who followed, listened, and ministered to Jesus and his followers. If we reflect again besides on Peter's mother-in-law, and her presiding over a substantive house, we can also picture the preparation and familiarity with fish. In John's post-resurrection story (John 21), bread

and fish, not bread and wine, make up the meal which has Eucharistic overtones. If the story is a Eucharistic *Midrash,* then women as disciples are part of those human beings and crowds who stand on the edge of the lake, who listen to Jesus, and who are gathered into life by the work of Simon and his associates. The "Fear not!" had already been spoken to Zacharias and to Mary before it was spoken to Peter.

Two Healing Stories

The next two healing stories are apparently part of the received tradition which the Synoptic writers incorporate into their Gospels. The vocabulary and the structure point to an early tradition. The first story is the healing of a leper, the second the healing of a paralyzed person. Leprosy was traditionally a metaphor of sinfulness and brokenness, a metaphor of the inability to walk in faith. Besides pointing to the tradition of Jesus as healer, the dialogue in faith may well testify also to a pre-baptismal ritual of cleansing. The man is full of leprosy. Seeing Jesus, he makes the conventional prostration of homage and begs: Lord, if you will, you have the power *(dynasai)* to cleanse *(katharisai)* me (Luke 5:12). The word *dynamis* has the same root from which come our words for dynamic, dynamite. It is a power which is explosive and self originating. Catharsis is a parallel kind of cleansing, physical, emotional, total. The catharsis of Greek drama was also transformative, healing, and renewing. It cleaned out in order to give life.

Jesus stretches out his hand. His verb matches that of the request: if you are willing. Jesus says, "I am willing," and then the imperative: "Be thou cleansed" (Luke 5:13). The cleansing is immediate. Luke and Matthew follow the enigmatic "Messiah-secret" tradition of Mark. "Don't tell anyone." Jesus also tells the man to follow the Mosaic law by showing himself to the priest who was health officer as well as religious leader. The word does go out though and crowds continue to accompany Jesus in order to hear and to be healed from their weaknesses. Jesus withdraws into the deserts and prays (Luke 5:16).

In the second healing story Jesus is pictured in typical rabbinic fashion, but he has attracted other teachers: Pharisees and law-

teachers, who have come from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. For Luke the place names probably represent not only geographic regions but also schools of religious teaching and interpretation. But the dynamic power of the Lord is in Jesus.

Then unfolds the dramatic and touching narrative of the paralyzed man brought on a mat (Luke 5:18-26). There is such a crowd that the only way to lay the man before Jesus is to remove tiles from the roof and let the man down before Jesus. Jesus sees their faith and addresses the paralyzed person: "Your sins have been forgiven." The Scribes and Pharisees begin to argue that this is blasphemy since only God can forgive sins. Jesus simply asks: "Which is easier to say: Your sins have been forgiven or to say: Rise and walk. But that you may know that the son of the earth has authority on the earth to forgive sins, [he says to the paralyzed person:] Rise and take your mat and go into your house." At once the person rising up before them, takes the mat on which he had been lying, and goes away to his house, glorifying God. They are all astounded *(ekstasis)* and glorify God, saying: "We saw wonderful *(paradoxa)* things today" (Luke 5:26).

What is going on in this story? Were there women present? Probably, although none are mentioned. We have, nevertheless, a story that communicated to the early Christian community the paradigm of the person paralyzed by a physical cause or by sins. Jesus never asks about the sins of the past. His attitude is the antithesis of the legalistic. Of course, we are reminded of the similarities with such stories as that of the forgiven woman. Forgiveness is instantaneous, immediate. In the question posed by Jesus we have the parallels: Your sins are forgiven/ Rise and walk. They are two sides of the same power and action, and Jesus has authority over both. Your sins are forgiven is not a passive state. It is one which impels the action of rising and walking.

The verb "rise" is the command we have encountered before: *Egeire* (Luke 5:23), not only a getting up but resurrection. Walk *(peripatei)* is to walk around, but it is also the verb associated with a school or a way of life. Aristotle's school in ancient Greece was called a *peripatetic* school, and subsequently the word referred to those situations of master and those disciples who were learning a way of life. The root also connotes a reversal in the sense that

becoming a disciple is not only a physical walking around, making of turns, but also the continuing reversals necessary along the path of becoming a disciple. The term was also appropriate for the school of discipleship which the following of Jesus came to represent.

The Call of the Tax Collector

The editor continues with the story of the call of Levi the tax collector, followed by a great feast, and a discussion comparing the fasting practices of the followers of John with the eating and drinking customs of the followers of Jesus (Luke 5:27-35). In Matthew's account the tax collector is named Matthew rather than Levi. What's in a name? Levi, of course, is the name of one of the sons of Jacob and Leah, the son from whom was traced the priestly tribe of priests, although there is also a distinctive priestly group referred to as the sons of Aaron. Does the name Matthew have connotations of the Greek *mathētes* which means disciple? We can only speculate. However, there are contradictions within this grouping of narratives and discourses which raise questions but at the same time extend the panorama of the gathering of disciples. The reader learns not only the variety of backgrounds but also the immediacy of response to the call to follow Jesus. Did women come from equally diverse backgrounds? Yes. Did some women respond with similar immediacy? Yes.

Jesus went forth and saw the tax collector sitting at the custom house. The individuals mentioned thus far in Luke's narrative of Jesus' ministry have included: a demoniac, Peter's mother-in-law, Simon with his partners James and John (Luke does not mention Andrew here), a leper, and a paralytic. The next character in the panorama is Levi, a tax collector, despised by the Jewish people because he collected taxes from them for their Roman oppressors. The call is starkly simple: Jesus sees him and says, "Follow me." The next line is remarkable: Abandoning *(katalipōn)* all things, rising up *(anastas),* he followed him (Luke 5:28). These actions seem to be three steps or parts of the process of becoming a disciple. The one flows into the other. They also seem to refer to the death-resurrection of the baptismal-Eucharistic tradition. A

primary meaning of the verb *katalipō* is to leave behind at death, just as *anastas* comes to signify the new life in Christ.

Were women called to similar commitment? Yes. But what about the traditional interpretation of "abandoning of all things" in terms of material goods, whether for men or for women? Abandonment of material goods is ambiguous at best in the whole of the New Testament. We have an immediate contradiction in the narrative at this point because the next line says that Levi made a great feast in his own house and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and others who reclined at the feast. Was this one last huge party that Levi was spending his wealth on? It doesn't seem likely, since the commentary in the next section contrasts Jesus' disciples with the ascetic followers of John. If abandoning all things does not mean the divestment of all material wealth, then what does it mean? Does it mean the sharing of the wealth with the community? We have references to that in Acts, but those too are enigmatic.

Apparently there is a flexibility and diversity in the relationship to actual wealth or goods. We alluded earlier to the description of the women who from their own substance ministered to Jesus and to the disciples. The almost formulaic or technical meaning of the words describing Levi may rather suggest an emphasis on the community's interpretation of discipleship as a death to all things in Christ and a sharing in the new life of the resurrected Christ. If so, the fact that Levi the despised tax collector was called and immediately entered into this life of a disciple is one that would give hope to another group often despised: women who could also enter into such a process of discipleship.

There is another point to reflect on. Women usually did not have the luxury of being in a position of having wealth. The women with substance we have referred to thus far were the exceptions. Typically, then as today, women usually had to rely on men for income and subsistence. If they were unmarried, they relied on the parental situation. If they were married, they were dependent on their husbands. If they were widows, they might be fortunate enough to be part of a widow's group. In early Christianity, there seems to have been an opportunity to find alternative support in the communities, although this custom was

not without its difficulties. Whatever their position, it is understandable that women would be attracted to the death-new life mode of discipleship described for Levi.

Disciples and the New Relationships

At the great feast which Levi provides, the Pharisees and their Scribes grumble about Jesus' disciples *(mathētas):* "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 5:30)? This is confusing: are the Pharisees at the feast or not? If they are, then are they also eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, the very thing they are criticizing? If they are not at the feast, how can they be speaking to Jesus? Separate seating arrangements do not solve the problem. Whether the situation refers to an actual event or not, the point is to provide a context and dialogue for Jesus' saying: "Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call righteous persons but sinners to repentance and change of life" (Luke 5:31-32).

Several other sayings of Jesus are arranged here to continue the theme. The Pharisees and the Scribes continue to press the point: "Why do John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples fast often and make prayers, but yours eat and drink?" (Luke 5:33).

Jesus answers with a rabbinic enigmatic question: "Can you make the bridegroom's friends fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Luke 5:34). What are precedents for applying bridegroom imagery to Jesus? There are at least three places from the Scriptures which the early communities must have read. The first is from Psalm 19:1-6:

> The heavens are telling the glory of God,
> and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
> Day to day pours forth speech,
> and night to night declares knowledge.
> There is no speech, nor are there words,
> their voice is not heard,
> Yet their sound goes out through all the earth,
> and their words to the end of the world.
> In them he has set a tabernacle for the *sun*

which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

Whatever the differences in the Hebrew and the Greek and various translations, we have here an image of a godly sun radiant like a bridegroom who was often bedecked with the richest garments and jewels. The image, however, is not so much of a bridegroom as of the sun rising radiant in the sky.

Isaiah 61 is the section already quoted by Jesus in the synagogue referring to himself and his mission: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me." A little farther along is the song:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring forth before all the nations (Isa 61:10-11).

It is helpful to note here that the image is not only masculine. As is so often true in the imagery of the Jewish Scriptures, the imagery is also feminine. The Lord's anointed, the Lord's servant rejoicing in God is radiant as a bridegroom *and as a bride.*

In Isaiah 62:5, the image shifts. It is now Jerusalem or Israel which is being addressed:

For as a young man marries a virgin,
so shall your sons marry you (an image of fertility and faithfulness)
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride
so shall your God rejoice over you (Isa 62:5).

There are two things to be noted here. One is the apparently passive situation of the bride. Mystics through the ages, Jewish

and Christian, have interpreted this not in an oppressive sense, but in the sense of total commitment to God which gives a certain identity. Today some feminists are rightly unhappy with what they read as the implication of passivity, subordination, and oppression. However, mystics have often read these images as implying for the bride a oneness, even an identity, with the bridegroom. At least, we can see here how the bridegroom is identified with God, and we can deduce how subsequently Jesus as bridegroom is identified with God. The bride is Jerusalem or Israel, the People of God. What is suggested is a time of ecstatic rejoicing when fasting is a contradiction. But such ecstasy will be followed by days when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, an obvious allusion to the death of Jesus.

The section concludes with a group of sayings about the old and the new. No one puts a new patch on an old garment. Having different tensions, the new will rip the old. No one puts new wine into old skin bottles. The new wine will split the bottles and be spilled, and the bottles will perish. New wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. Someone used to the old thinks the old is better (Luke 5:36-39).

Women would surely hear the message painted in so many marvelous images. Jesus brings a time of celebration, of feasting. God is now a radiant bridegroom and bride among us dancing, and leading all people to a house of rejoicing. It is a time for new wine, new wineskins, and new garments.

4

WHAT OF THE SABBATH?

Luke 6

Just as the preceding narratives and dialogues make clear the importance Jesus gives to feasting and celebration, not only with disciples but also with tax collectors and sinners, and just as he calls for a time of new garments and new wine, so do the next two stories show that Jesus is lord of the Sabbath and that the Sabbath was made for human good and healing.

In the first he and his disciples are going through a cornfield or a wheatfield on a Sabbath (Luke 6:1). They do the very natural thing of plucking the ears of grain from the stalk, rubbing it in their hands to release the kernels, and eating them. As in the previous story, it is not clear whether the Pharisees are accompanying them or are brought in by the narrator to pursue the argument. At any rate, they represent the point of view of the legalists. The assumption is that Jesus and his disciples are breaking the Sabbath law of not working or harvesting on the Sabbath. There is perhaps irony and humor here in criticizing such a small action, except that evidently some legalists distorted the law to this limit and thereby oppressed many people.

The Pharisees say: "Why do you do what is not lawful on Sabbath days?" (Luke 6:2). We have the context for another saying of Jesus important to the tradition:

> "Haven't you read what David and those who were with him did on the Sabbath when they were hungry? How he entered into the

> house of God and taking the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for anyone to eat but the priests, he gave it to those who were with him. The son of the earth is lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:3-5).

In many ways this is an intriguing commentary on the law. That the disciples are plucking grain is in itself described in the law as allowed. The author was apparently familiar with Deuteronomy 24:25: "When you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain." Ironically, they are exactly in conformity with the law which emphasized the human, common sense, and the needs of the poor or the migrant, among whom were often women with no other support. One is reminded of the story of Ruth and Naomi, who are examples of women knowledgeable in the law and able to use the law to their advantage. The story of Ruth and Naomi is also an example of how a younger woman may learn from an older woman as mentor and friend. Whether women were or were not in this story of plucking grain, it is certainly a story to which women as migrants would relate.

We also have here an antithesis between the settled agricultural perspective often associated with land owners and property and the nomadic or itinerant often dependent on day-to-day sustenance. Jesus represented the latter point of view.

The illustration about David adds several dimensions. In the cure of the leper, Jesus tells the healed man to go show himself to the priest in order to follow the law of Moses (Luke 5:14). The story of Levi is an ironic commentary on the Levirite law of fasting (Luke 5:29-32). Jesus probably recognizes that the law is a priestly law the Pharisees are applying inappropriately to Jesus and his disciples. Although it might be construed that John as son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, both of the priestly line, appropriately fasted according to that law, Jesus is not of the Levirite priestly line, although Luke includes Levi in the genealogy of Jesus. However, he fulfills or follows the more universal and higher law of the great leaders, Moses and now David, who represent a more common-sense approach.

How is David pictured as keeping the law? When David and

his companions were hungry, they went into the house of God, the tent of the Presence reserved to the priests, and David took the loaves of the Presence and gave them to his companions to eat, although it was not "lawful" for any except the priests to eat this bread. The language certainly suggests Eucharistic references. These loaves were twelve round loaves set on a table in the Temple to represent the Presence of God. David recognizes them as food for the hungry. A Christian audience would recognize them as loaves of the Eucharist, the bread of the Presence. Who would have made this bread each day or week for the Temple? From Egyptian tomb figures we have many examples of men and slaves as bakers. Did male priests make this special bread? Perhaps, but more typically in the culture of the poor familiar to Jesus and the early Christians, the woman was the baker of bread. With her body, with her hands and mind, she ground the grain, mixed the flour, kneaded the dough, baked the loaf in an oven, and brought it forth to provide for the community.

Jesus as son of the earth as part of the human community is lord of the Sabbath. There is a ring of the ironic and the humorous here. It is not a priest who is lord of the Sabbath. The lord of the Sabbath is Jesus who has associated himself with tax collectors, sinners, the human, women and men. He is in the tradition of Moses and David, following their example.

In the second Sabbath story placed here, Jesus enters into a synagogue and according to Luke teaches (Luke 6:6-7). In the synagogue is a person whose right hand is withered or dried up. It should be noted that the person is in the synagogue. The person's right hand signifies his power and strength. Do we have a symbol of Israel whose power and strength is dried up? This time the Scribes and Pharisees are watching to see if he heals on the Sabbath so that they may find reason to accuse him.

Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jesus

It is interesting to note how the Scribes and Pharisees and sometimes the Sadducees are characterized in this series of stories. In the case of the man brought in from the roof, they enter into a dialogue saying that Jesus speaks blasphemy because only

God can forgive sins (Luke 5:21). In the case of Levi, the Scribes and Pharisees murmur against the disciples because they are eating and drinking with tax collectors and with sinners (Luke 5:30). When the disciples pluck the grain, the Pharisees ask: "Why do you do what is not allowed on the Sabbath?" (Luke 6:2). Now in this situation they are looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.

It should also be pointed out how biased a view the Gospel writers present of the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees. Contemporary research makes it clear that a selective prejudice is operating in these accounts. Whereas there is no doubt that some Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees were seen as enemies of Jesus and his followers, the words themselves refer to much larger groups than the Gospels suggest. Scribes were not only any secretaries, clerks, or assistants attached to the Pharisaic group which opposed Jesus, but the term also refers to all those who performed the secretarial services for anyone. Paul used a public or private scribe on many occasions.

The Pharisees as a Jewish sect not only developed the doctrine of resurrection but also the ethic of love, both of which were basic to Jesus' background. The Sadducees had developed their understanding and interpretation of the law in a way both scholarly and effective. Evidently, however, some within the groups by their interpretations and actions of oppression had alienated the common people and the poor, including Jesus.

Jesus knows their "reasonings"—it would not be hard to catch on by now! So Jesus addresses the man with the withered hand: "Rise *(egeire)* and stand *(stēthi)* in the middle." Rising up *(anastas),* the man stood *(estē)* (Luke 6:8). Again, whatever the historical basis, we have a ritual type formula, with resurrection new life overtones in the verbs of "rising." The imperative "stand," especially adding "in the middle," can refer to a synagogue in which the members sat around and left a space in the middle for the reader or the interpreter. For Luke's community it would call to mind the structure of a Christian community in which a person was called forth to new life, and to taking a stand. "Standing forth" here has the connotation of taking a public stand, making a commitment. This is also the physical structure of the calling forth of a witness in a court context.

Jesus now takes the initiative in the dialogue about the Sabbath: "I ask you if it is lawful on the Sabbath *to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?*" (Luke 6:9). These are parallel phrases, the one defining and interpreting the other. From the Pharisees' attitude of legalism, Jesus moves the debate to the essence of the message of the prophets, from Amos, through all the tradition including Isaiah and Jeremiah: The question is one of doing good or evil, of saving life or destroying life. The Sabbath is subordinate to this elemental question and to the actions which flow from one's answer. The question is rhetorical. No one answers. But Jesus looks around at all of them. We have the sense of the challenge and the authority such a look connotes. He says to the one standing in the middle: "Stretch out your hand." And he did and his hand was restored (Luke 6:10).

The story moves on at least three levels. The first is that of the historical precedent from which the account found its way into the Synoptic tradition. Is it likely that Jesus acted in this way and healed in this way? Yes. The second level is that which refers to that part of Israel which has not been faithful to the message of the prophets of doing good and avoiding evil, of saving life and not destroying. The third level is that worship context in which the Lukan community would have recognized the structure of being called to rise to the new life and of standing in the midst to make a commitment, to be confirmed in a choice of the good.

It is no wonder that the narrative concludes with the summary: They were filled with madness and talked with one another about what they might do to Jesus (Luke 6:11).

Women as Hearers

How would a woman hear these stories? First, in regard to the Sabbath, women like many men would have experienced a fresh breeze of interpretation lodged in the tradition of the prophets' call to do good and avoid evil, to use common sense, to save life and not destroy it. Such a principle of interpretation would also be applied to those aspects of the law and its interpretation that were degrading and even destructive to women. No wonder women felt a call to freedom that gave them new life.

The allusion to the precedent of David and his companions entering into the house of God and eating the loaves of the Presence, lawful only for the priests to eat, reopened the experience of the presence of God to the act of eating loaves of bread. It transformed the house of God from a forbidden and secret place to a house in which David ate with his companions and nourished himself when he was hungry, and perhaps even to the experience of walking though the fields. The interpretation here is evidently from the oral tradition, but it is interesting to read from the Hebrew Scriptures the ancient accounts.

In Leviticus 24 the Lord tells Moses that Aaron shall keep the tent of meeting in order "from evening to morning *before the Lord* continually. . . . And you shall take fine flour and bake *twelve* loaves, and you shall set them in two rows, six in a row, upon the table of pure gold." This is sign of memorial and covenant and they shall eat it in a holy place (Lev 24:1-9). However, "If a priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food" (Lev 22:13). Women, then, including wives and others, in the ancient tradition shared in the bread.

In the story of David according to the account in 1 Samuel, David asks the priest Ahimelech: "What have you at hand? Give me *five* loaves of bread or whatever is here" (1 Sam 21:2-4). The priest says: "I have no common bread, but there is holy bread." The priest's concern is that the companions have polluted themselves through fornication, but David assures the priest that they are holy or clean. "So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away" (1 Sam 21:7).

The tradition to which Jesus brings his interpretation is that the common sense of hunger overrides legalism and that the Sabbath is not to be oppressive or idolized.

The Formal Calling of the Twelve

In the New Testament the names of the various groups of followers are ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. *Disciples*

(mathētai) are those who follow the way of Jesus. The Twelve *(dōdeka)* become a distinct group although the lists vary somewhat in the names (See Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13). Although "apostle" traditionally has been attributed to the twelve, the texts are not that clear. "Apostle" is simply "one who is sent." Paul is acknowledged as apostle, and women, even if not explicitly called "apostle," seem also to have been within the category of those who are sent.

In the Synoptic tradition the calling of the Twelve is set apart. Jesus goes out into a mountain to pray, and continues all night in prayer to God. When it is day, he calls his disciples—women among them?—and chooses from them twelve whom he also names apostles (Luke 6:13-16). If women were not among those chosen, did they merely acquiesce as part of their cultural tradition? Did some of these twelve have wives and daughters who traveled with them? If the answer is yes to the first question, and no to the second, although that seems unlikely, there is still the question of the importance and description of many women in the Gospels who play significant parts as contrasted with the fact that at least half among those named as the twelve have their only claim to fame in this listing, since they are not otherwise mentioned.

A Way of Life

Whatever the place of the Twelve, the narrative then moves to what is called in Matthew the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1 ff.), but which Luke describes as on a plain. Jesus came down from the mountain with the disciples who had accompanied him and stood on a level place, a large crowd of disciples with him, and a large multitude of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coast country of Tyre and Sidon. These came to hear him and be cured from their diseases, and ones who were tormented with unclean spirits were healed. And all the crowd sought to touch him because power *(dynamis)* went forth from him and cured all (Luke 6:19). This is the setting then for the summary of Jesus' teaching as a way of life.

The various teachers of classical Greece and of Israel, as well as of other near Eastern cultures, usually had disciples who would

take down their oral teachings for the instruction of others who would come. Typically, a core of teachings would eventually be abstracted and summarized for the usefulness especially of beginners. We have an example, for instance, from Epictetus, a Greek philosopher. This sermon of Jesus on the mount according to Matthew or sermon on the plain according to Luke, seems to be such a summary, in which sayings of Jesus have been grouped together. Like Matthew's, Luke's account begins with the lists referred to as the beatitudes (Happy or blessed are you . . . .) (Luke 6:20).

In classical Greek *makar*, meaning "blessed" or "happy," is properly used of the gods, as opposed to mortals. When applied to human beings, it means those who are supremely blessed or fortunate, but also, interestingly, prosperous or wealthy, or even one of the upper classes. The dead were called *makares,* those who were beyond the reach of pain. Although not used by Mark, in the tradition which Matthew and Luke follow, it seems to have become a technical or formula word referring to those who are blessed as followers of Jesus.

It is a formula word well taken over from meditations on the psalms. For example, Psalm 83 (Septuagint) includes three of the *makarioi* statements:

> *Blessed* are those who dwell in your house:
> they will praise you forever.
> *Blessed* is the one whose help is from you, Lord *(kyrie):*
> in his heart he has planned to go up
> through the valley of weeping to the place appointed,
> for the law giver will grant blessings:
> God will be seen in Zion.
> Behold O God our defender,
> and look on the face of your anointed *(Christou)*
> Lord *(kyrie)* of the powerful *(dynameōn),*
> *blessed* is the one who hopes in you (LXX, Ps 83:4, 5, 9, 12).

There seem to be many levels of interpretation going on. For the Jewish people, this was one of the songs of ascent, one of the songs sung as they went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts. If we follow the account of Luke describing Jesus going up to

Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph when he was twelve, it is possible to picture them singing this psalm. It is even intriguing to think there may be a pun on *mar/kyrie,* the Hebrew/Greek title applied perhaps to Jesus.

If we picture the Lukan community, we can ask a number of questions: Did they consider themselves "those who dwell in the Lord's house"? By the time of the writing or editing of Luke, the Temple and everything else in Jerusalem would have been destroyed. Who is the one planning to go up through the valley of weeping? Is it Jesus the Christ? The reference to the Christ, the anointed, in a subsequent line makes that possible. Is this also the blessed "one who hopes in you"? But on another level, is there an assimilation of the followers of the Christ? Are they also the blessed, the *makarioi?*

Although Matthew lists eight or nine of these maxims, Luke lists four. The rhythm of the lines suggests that they may have originally been sung, just as the psalm mentioned above was sung. The questions above are intriguing when we look once again at Luke's list:

> "Blessed are you poor,
> because yours is the kingdom of God.
> Blessed are you who are hungering now,
> because you will be full.
> Blessed are you who are weeping now,
> because you will laugh.
> Blessed are you when people hate you,
> and when they separate you
> and reproach and cast out your name as evil
> for the sake of the son of the earth.
> Rejoice in that day and skip for joy,
> for your reward is in heaven,
> for so their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:20-23).

Then Luke lists the opposite of each of these in the "woes":

> "Woe to you the rich ones,
> because you have your consolation.
> Woe to you who have been filled up,
> because you will hunger.

Woe to you who are laughing now,
because you will mourn and lament.
Woe when everyone speaks well of you,
for so did the fathers speak of the false prophets" (Luke 6:24–26).

How would women react to such a list of "laws?" We have clues to a culture which included women who were poor, hungering, and weeping, people who were hated and whose names were reproached as evil for the sake of the son of the earth. But those so described are entreated to rejoice and to skip for joy.

On the other hand, rich women, filled up, and laughing now, women who were spoken well of, were evidently also part of the societal groups which made up Luke's audience. The laws provide a paradox, but they certainly are clear in the preference given to those who are poor, hungering, and weeping. No doubt in the turbulence of the first century, in Jesus' time, as well as after the destruction of the Temple and all of Jerusalem, in conflicts similar to those described by Paul in his letters, there were many who would identify with this description of a difficult way of life.

As for those who were rich, they evidently were called to a way of life not characterized by richness, by being filled up, by laughing now, or being spoken well of. The picture which emerges is a paradox of negative emotions and emotions transformed by a new way of life so that the kingdom, the being full, the laughing and the rejoicing are related to being part of the kingdom as followers of Jesus. Those self satisfied or materially satisfied are called to a transformation to a new kind of joy and emotion.

Next comes a list of what these followers then shall do (Luke 6:27-49). It begins with: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." The list is a paradoxical and difficult one. It includes blessing those that curse you, giving to those who ask, doing to others as you would have them do to you. There is no doubt that many women through the ages have allowed themselves to be exploited through an interpretation of these exhortations which has victimized them, and which has reinforced their servitude. Other women, however, have seen them in the light of a way toward freedom, toward breaking the lines of destruction and retaliation. By refusing to play the game of servitude, they

have found a way to break the circuit, confound their enemies, and begin living the law of freedom as children of the most high. In that way they identify with a creator who is kind *(chrēstos)*, compassionate to the unthankful and even to the evil:

> "Be compassionate as your father is compassionate.
> Judge not and you shall not be judged.
> Give and it shall be given to you" (Luke 6:36-38).

> "The disciple is not above the master,
> but having been completed, everyone will be as one's
> teacher" (Luke 6:40).

What is painted is a picture of a community of those serving each other and learning from each other, contradicting the norms and the values of the prevalent societies. Whoever comes to Jesus, hears his sayings, and does them shall be like a person building a house with a foundation on rock *(petran)* (Luke 6:48) which the flood will not be able to shake. But those who do not listen are like those who build without a foundation so that the ruin of that house is very great.

5

TWO MORE CURES

Luke 7

After a summary statement that Jesus completed all these words and entered into the city of Capernaum, the narrative continues with two more cures, in typical Lukan fashion, the first one featuring a man, and the next one featuring a woman.

Whatever the perspective of each of the Gospel writers, the reaching out for the universal and the inclusion of diverse types of persons who came to Jesus reflect not only the probable actions and attitudes of Jesus but also the importance of those qualities in the traditions. The centurion, probably a Roman and considered of high rank by these communities, is the subject of the first account (Luke 7:2-10). The centurion's slave or servant *(doulos)* is sick, and is about to die. Luke's account also has the centurion sending elders of the Jews to ask Jesus to come. It is these elders in the Lukan account who say that the centurion is worthy because he "loves our nation and he built us our synagogue" (Luke 7:4-5).

In the same way, in Luke's account, the centurion sends friends to say: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word and let my servant be healed" (Luke 7:6-7).

Why does Luke's tradition have the centurion speak with Jesus only through intermediaries? Is he following a tradition which preserved the mention of the intermediaries? Or does he harbor

too painful an experience with actual Roman centurions or other officials that he cannot describe Jesus as physically interacting with one? The story does not point that way.

However, if we move the level of interpretation to that of a Lukan community familiar with experiences and rituals of persons coming to Jesus and coming to the community, then we can see possible clues.

We have a slave or a servant who is about to die, and he is honored or prized by the centurion. The centurion seems to represent the Roman people, as well as civil authority in general. The Greek is *hekaton-t-archēs,* "leader of a hundred." In Greek the same root *hekate* is Hecate, daughter of Perses and Asteria, who had power from Zeus in heaven, earth, and sea, and later was held to be the same as Artemis, patroness of women. In Acts 19:28, 34 Luke preserves a description of the power of this tradition in telling how Paul was perceived to be a threat to the common religion: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Was there a healing story of a servant or of a beloved son in the Hecate or Artemis tradition? Are there some precedents among the folk literature? Whatever the sources, the formulaic statement of unworthiness and total faith in the power of Jesus' Word to bring healing certainly can give us a glimpse of a community which prized healing, which brought even persons of authority to be healed through faith. Such a community treasured the sense of Jesus marveling at the person's faith, and saying that he had not found such faith in Israel.

If we look at the whole structure of the story of the centurion's son, it seems that whatever the reasons, the story is serving as exemplar to move forward Luke's major theme of the new life of resurrection. As the centurion representing power over all things recognized Jesus as having total power by the simplicity of his Word, so now Jesus demonstrates the power of that Word even over death, the death, in fact, of a beloved son.

The parallel healing story featuring a woman is that of the healing of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Once again what we have and what we don't have raise intriguing questions. Why does Luke only have this story? And at the same time why does Luke not include in his Gospel the story of the Greek woman, Syrophoenician by birth, who in Matthew's version is a

Canaanite? (Matt 15:21-28). At first sight Mark's account of a woman whose daughter is possessed of an unclean spirit, would seem to be one which would have been preserved in Luke's tradition and one which Luke would find appropriate to his purposes. It is about a woman and her daughter. The woman has great faith. She is either humble or witty or both in answering Jesus that even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs (Mark 7:24-30).

Jesus went into a city called Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Although the meanings of both Capharnaum and Nain are uncertain, the *na* root or sounds may suggest a dwelling or a temple. The "temple" where Jesus healed was the city or the town where the people were. It was not necessary to go to a Temple for healing. It was not even necessary to go to Jesus. It was necessary to have faith in the power of Jesus to heal. His disciples and a crowd went with him. As he drew near the gate of the city, an only born son of a widow was being carried out of the city for burial, and a considerable crowd was with her.

This widow would have been economically and otherwise dependent on this son. Jesus is moved with compassion. This is a compassion of identification, of inwardness. In the Greek Temples a similar word often referred to a ritual augury of using the viscera of animals to determine action for future or for healing. No such dead legalism is part of the healing of Jesus. On the contrary, he tells the woman: Do not weep. He touches the bier, the ones carrying it stand, and he says: "Young man, I say to you, Arise" (Luke 7:13-14).

Amazement takes hold of them all and they glorify God. In other words, they are seized with an amazement that frees them to a glorious praising of God saying: "A great prophet was raised among us." This line will be key for what follows.

For a Christian community reveling in the new life of resurrection, the dead person has been transformed into a person who is now young and full of life. Like the people supporting the mother, the Christians in their time are amazed at the newly resurrected among them.

The word play continues. A great prophet—one who speaks for God—was raised *(ēgerthē)* among us (Luke 7:16). The raising, the resurrection is first applied to Jesus, but then to the widow's son.

(Jesus was also a widow's son.) But each Christian also enters into this resurrection. The rising, the new life is an energy that moves from one to another. It is analogous to say that God has visited his people and that he has transformed the dead to new life. The word of this then goes forth into all Judea and all the surrounding area. What was said of Jesus can be said of the one transformed from death into life whether in the time of Jesus, in the time of the early Christian community or in the time of Christ today. The word should go out of this transformation from death to life.

For women who experience so many forms of death in themselves and in those they love, the hope of transformation into new life is what carries them through the traumatic experience and creates the new.

The Witness of John the Baptist

The scene shifts to the witness of John the Baptist (Luke 7:18). John's disciples report to him what they have seen. As Luke tells it, John calls two of his disciples and sends them to Jesus. To have said that "a great prophet was raised among us" and that synonymously "God has come to his people" is to raise the question about John the Baptist as a prophet. Luke wants to make it clear that John himself witnesses to Jesus as great prophet.

Luke's account differs from Matthew's in numbering the disciples as typically two, who are sent to ask if Jesus is the one who is coming or whether they should look for another (Luke 7:19). It is noteworthy that John's disciples are looking for the Messiah. In no way do they look on John as the Messiah.

After they ask Jesus about his identity, Luke inserts a description of Jesus as working the signs of the "one who is to come." Jesus heals many from diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and he gives sight to many blind persons (Luke 7:22). The word for "heals" has the same root as "therapeutic." For a Greek audience, healing was not only physical. Whatever the physical aspects, the whole person was to be healed.

At Epidaurus, about sixty miles south of Athens, was a huge center of healing in Luke's time. There were many similar ones

throughout the Mediterranean. The ruins today indicate a large structure which we would think of as a hospital. A short distance across the grass is the famous theater of Epidaurus where the great Greek dramas were and still sometimes are performed.

The use of medicinal waters, herbs, or other therapies, was followed by the liturgy of a communally experienced drama with its actions, its religious, mythological and historical narratives, its wisdom, and its therapeutic or transforming effects on the participants. Those who came there in need of healing were usually healed in one way or another, and refreshed, made new.

What stands out in Luke's commentary on the Christian experience is the centrality given to the transformation from death to new life.

So Jesus is pictured as responding with his actions and his words: "Going, report to John what you saw and heard." The same is being said to those in the Christian community: "Going, report:"

> "Blind people see again.
> Lame people walk.
> Lepers are being cleansed.
> Deaf hear.
> Dead persons are raised.
> Poor people are evangelized.
> (The good news is preached to them.)
> And blessed is the one who is not scandalized in me" (Luke 7:22–23).

The parallel structure and the formulaic quality of the words suggest a summary which reminds us of the sayings of the beatitudes.

In terms of discipleship and Christian community, those who come to Jesus blind are enabled once again to see. Those who are crippled, limping, and weak can walk in a new way of following a course of life with Jesus. Those who are leprous are cleansed *(katharizontai)*. A catharsis takes place, not only physically but wholly. A catharsis is not only a cleansing from filth, but a pruning, a scraping away, a cleansing from sin.

Kōphoi, the word translated as "deaf persons," means blunt or dull when used of a weapon but also dull or deprived of hearing.

In Matthew 9:32-33, it refers to one who is dumb, who cannot speak because he is demon-possessed.

In Luke's phrase the *kōphoi* hear *(akouousin),* a favorite Lukan word which connotes the ability of a disciple to hear, to understand, and to speak for the master. True hearing is transformed into prophetic speaking.

But then comes the even more dramatic "the dead are raised." *Nekroi egeirontai.* This is commentary on the widow's son: The dead person *(nekros)* sat up and began to speak. But it is also the touch-stone of Christian community: the dead are raised into new life.

At first sight the last phrase seems anti-climactic and out of place: The good news is preached to poor people. What a contradiction to common experience! Poor people have good news! Healing and resurrection are not just for those who can go to Epidaurus. New life is not just for those who are rich. The poor are called to healing and to new life in Christ. What a remarkable call!

But this is scandalous for many. What does this mean? To scandalize is to cause to stumble, to offend, to shock, to falter, or to fall away. So a *makarios,* a "blessed saying" is added: "Blessed is whoever who is not scandalized in me" (Luke 7:23).

How did women relate to these sayings? It is interesting that the Gospels do not describe any women as blind, or lame, as leprous, or as deaf, although there is the one beautiful story of the raising of Jairus' daughter who had died. Were there women who were physically blind, lame, leprous, or deaf? No doubt. But were women more apt to see, walk, be cleansed, and hear spiritually? From some of the examples this seems to be a reasonable assumption.

We can picture women witnessing these hopeful and Messianic signs, and recognizing, indeed, the one who has come. God has come among her people. These women were not scandalized or shocked. They welcomed God in their midst. They rejoiced in the new seeing, the new walking in discipleship, the cleansing, the new hearing, the rising from the dead, and the new Christ-life for the poor.

Now Jesus reciprocates and witnesses to John and thereby continues the mutual witness John and Jesus give to each other which Luke began in the Elizabeth-Mary, John-Jesus cycle.

Jesus asks: "What did you go into the desert to see?
—a reed shaken in the wind?
—a person in soft garments?
—a prophet?"
"I tell you: more than a prophet.
—the messenger
—who goes before you
—who will prepare your way" (Luke 7:24-27).

John in the desert and John preaching were constructing the road or the way for God to come among the people:

"Among those born of women, no one is greater than John.
But the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28).

Far from a put-down of woman as merely providing the womb for a man to be born, this maxim which was current among the early Christians, acknowledges that no matter how great—John or Jesus, or any other, only comes to be as born of a woman.

In the Jewish and Christian traditions this concept differs from those mythologies which describe great persons as sprung from the head of Zeus, as in the Greek, or emerging from a lotus of the Nile as in the case of Tutenkhomen, or emerging from a mythical god or goddess. In the Gospel tradition the woman is the source, the progenitor, the beginning.

Not only that, but more: The least in the kingdom of God is greater than any of these, greater even than John the Baptist.

An additional insight into Luke's thinking is provided when we compare his account with that of Matthew. "Of those born of woman, no greater has risen than John the Baptist" (Matt 11:11). Luke wants no confusion about John the Baptist rising. Rising from the dead is the prerogative of Jesus and those with him in the kingdom who rise.

The interpolation of verses 29 and 30 reflects the continuing interweaving and smoothing over of conflict between the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus in the early Christian communities. The verses may reflect the interpretation that those who were baptized by John, including tax collectors, were happy

and proved in the right in that Jesus affirmed their baptism, while the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the design of God for themselves, including the baptism of John.

The rhetorical dialogue continues: "To what shall I liken the men of this generation?" (Luke 7:31). It is intriguing that Matthew's version says only: "To what shall I liken this generation?" (11:16). Is Luke singling out men as those who do not understand the kingdom? There is no indication of any women in the Gospel rejecting Jesus.

A type of folk maxim is used for the simile. They are like young people or students *(paidiois)* sitting in the forum, who according to their title should be learning from the master, but who, instead, are ignoring the wisdom and are calling to others: "We played our flutes, but you did not dance. We sang our dirges but you did not mourn" (Luke 7:32). They are looking for the pseudo-simplicity of a cause-effect relationship, an either/or teaching. Instead of being open to learn, they expect others immediately to do what they call for.

In contrast, God works in diverse ways. John (Luke inserts "the Baptist") has come not eating bread nor drinking wine and you say: "He has a demon." The son of the earth Jesus has come eating and drinking and you say, "Behold a man who is a glutton and a wine-imbiber, a friend of tax collectors and of sinners. Such wisdom is proved right by all her children" (Luke 7:33-35).

This contrast of John and Jesus reflects a pronounced diversity in their personalities as well as in their teachings. There seems no question that John was known for his fasting and Jesus for his love of a party. Do we also have a Lukan allusion to the difference between the fasting and penance of John and his followers and the communal sharing of the bread and wine of Jesus and his followers?

Christians may not like to think of Jesus as being called a glutton and a wine-imbiber or even wino, but the words seem part of an early tradition. The sadness of the flute-ritual playing, the mourning dancing, the mourning chants and weeping were an expected part of religiosity. Jesus did not conform to their expectations. He ate and drank in celebrating community, whether with his own followers, with tax-collectors, with sinners, or with

women. Let the reader or the hearer interpret the maxim of the wisdom tradition. The woman image *wisdom (sophia),* is proved right or just by *her* children. Ironically, the saying disproves or proves unjust the children who according to their title should learn, but do not, and proves just and right the children or learners who with Jesus are eating and drinking in the community of those who receive him.

6

THE WOMAN WHO WASHES THE FEET OF JESUS

The story of the woman with the expensive ointment is common to the four Gospel writers, although in John it is Mary who "took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard" (John 12:3) but the accounts have interesting differences. Luke uses the account to amplify and illustrate the previous comment on wisdom and on eating and drinking in the community. If Luke gives previous accounts community or Eucharistic allusions, we may say then that he places this account not only in the context of a Eucharistic meal but that he adds the dimensions of forgiveness and commitment which embody love.

The other accounts emphasize the contrast of the rich ointment and the needs of the poor, as well as the image of the anointing of Jesus for his burial. In contrast, Luke holds up the woman as an example of forgiveness, faith, and love.

Luke places the event in the home of one of the Pharisees, following up the contrast described in the previous pericope. Jesus reclined at the table (Luke 7:36). The verb for "reclined" which Luke uses connotes the same context as in the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:14, and the reclining at the wedding banquet in Luke 14:8. Luke alone pictures the woman as a sinner (Luke 7:37). Unlike the Pharisee or the men of this generation who justify themselves, this woman accepts the attitude and the tenor of being a sinner. She is not unwilling to identify with the broken-

ness of the human condition. She is not concerned with what people will say. She is not constrained by the demands of a false protocol or of an oppressive society's expectations. Apparently she is following her intuition and her own judgement.

She brings an alabaster flask of ointment (Luke 7:37). Luke is the only one who eliminates the point that the ointment was very expensive. He does not want the woman to be identified with the powerful and the rich.

Alabaster is a beautiful, white or translucent glass-like gypsum found in nature. Lovely vases and jars made of alabaster in ancient times are on display in museums throughout the world, a witness to their wide use, but the only use of the word in the New Testament is in this story. Etymologically, the word is from the Egyptian: "vessel of (the goddess) Baste." Why did the Synoptic writers preserve the detail of the alabaster flask? Perhaps because it was unusually rich.

But one may speculate whether in the context of a ritual community the alabaster had acquired other connotations for the early Christians. Was an alabaster phial used for anointings associated with healings and baptisms? Was the breaking of the phial a sign of the breaking of the power of sin and the soothing of the ointment with its fragrance a sign of healing taking place? Did the translucence or whiteness suggest baptism? Did they hear in the word *alabastron* an assonance which suggested *baptisma* or one of its variants?

We are reminded of the anointings of David and of other figures of the Jewish tradition. Do the Synoptic writers give us a tradition of this anointing of Jesus as a parallel of his chosenness and leadership in the new order? If so, it is striking that the anointing is done by a woman, and even more so by a woman whom Luke calls a sinner. The kingliness of Jesus is certainly of a new kind.

Why do Mark and Matthew describe her as anointing the head of Jesus, but Luke and John show her anointing his feet? Do these simply represent different traditions or do they represent the modifications which take place in the handing on of an oral tradition? Even if the latter is the case, what perceptions or cultural world views would have shifted the anointing from the head to the feet? Is this shifting related to the traditions in Luke and John

of the woman wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair? Why is Luke the only one who describes her as standing at the feet of Jesus, wetting his feet with her tears and kissing them? (Luke 7:38) Is there an influence from the tradition of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples?

Whatever the network of influences, it is still remarkable that a woman is anointing Jesus, with all the connotations for the living and the dead. Even if women traditionally performed these services, it seems from the context that more levels are interacting than we usually see.

Did Luke have a story like John's of Mary weeping in the garden after the resurrection and find weeping and lack of faith inappropriate in the resurrection context? Has his tradition deemed the weeping more appropriate here? Both this account in Luke and John's narrative in the garden (John 20:11-18) conclude with parallel belief. In John's resurrection narrative, Mary says: "I have seen the Lord." In Luke's anointing story, the woman's action affirms the same faith. Luke omits the explicit allusion of the other writers who place the anointing in the context of an anointing for burial.

The details in Luke are very moving: she bathes his feet with her tears, she wipes them with the hairs of her head, and she reverently kisses his feet and anoints them with ointment *(myrō)*. This, however, is one of the same ointments mentioned in Luke 23:56 which the women prepared for the anointing of Jesus' body after his death and before the day of resurrection.

What of the etymology of the word "alabaster"—"to Baste?" There are many aspects of the cult of Baste, the lady of the East, which tease the imagination. The goddess Baste, known by other names, and equated with other goddesses at various times, was sculpted typically as a woman with either the head of a lioness or of a cat. The head of the lion, besides its other symbolisms, is a picture of the sun and its rays. The cat is a milder form of the lion. Baste was the dominant goddess of the eastern part of the Nile delta, the direction of the rising sun, and also the area closest to Syria. She is also pictured as a personification of the moon and as goddess of human birth.

The derivation of the name *Bast* in Egyptian is connected with the word for fire *bes* and the goddess may be regarded as a per-

sonification of heat as a power of the sun. In a number of Egyptian texts, Baste or Sekhet is described as a female personification of the heat and light of the sun-god who destroys the enemies both of the sun-god and of the dead. Generally Sekhet personified the burning destructive heat of the sun, and Baste represented the lesser heat which made possible germination, growth, and new life. Baste was also identified as the female counterpart of Ra and the personification of the soul of Isis.

The bloodthirsty goddess (Sekhet, and by extension Baste) who could kill could also cure. Just as this Lady of the Messengers of Death could visit them upon Egypt in the form of epidemics, so she could be persuaded to revive them through the performance of the rite of "appeasing Sekhet." The title "Priest of Sekhet" came to mean "doctor," possibly because her priests were entrusted with the task of driving out the evil spirits that the ancient Egyptians thought were the causes of sickness; and who better to fight demons than the goddess of war (Barbara Watterson, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt*. New York: Facts on File, 1984, 171).

About sixty kilometers northeast of Cairo are the ruins of the city of Bubastis, the capital and chief cult center of the goddess. The triad of gods there consisted of Osiris, the god of the dead, of fertility, and of resurrection, Baste, and their child also called Baste. In the mythology, it was Baste who went down into the underworld and brought Osiris forth into the land of the living.

The Greek historian of the fifth century Herodotus describes one of the main festivals there during April or May. Large numbers of men and women sail towards the city. Certain of the women play upon drums and tabers and make a great sound and noise while the men play on pipes. Others clap their hands and sing as loudly as possible. Some of the women continue their mirth; others scold and revile the women of the city. Many traipse and dance flirtingly. Others cast up their clothes and openly reveal their bodies. Assembled and gathered together at Bubastis, they honor the feast with great solemnity, making offerings to Diana (whom Herodotus and other Greeks identified with Baste). There is more expense and effusion of grape wine than in all the rest of the year. Clearly Herodotus is describing a major

cult celebration. Although Herodotus writes in the fifth century before the Common Era, the cult of Baste extended back thousands of years and continued into the era after Christ at least until the decree of Constantine and probably for quite a while afterwards.

The cult of Osiris and his consort was associated with the mummifying of the body, which in the Egyptian view was considered necessary for resurrection. This custom became a conflict with the coming of Christianity. In fact, many Egyptian Christians in the early centuries continued to mummify the bodies of their dead. St. Anthony the Great begged his followers not to mummify his body, but to bury it where it could not be found by others who would draw it forth and mummify it. He begged the bishops and preachers to exhort the people not to continue this useless custom. At the resurrection he would receive his incorruptible body from his Savior. Gradually the reasons for mummifying and the knowledge of the art were lost. The cult of Osiris was replaced by the Christian Egyptian worship of Christ.

Herodotus gives a beautiful description of the city itself. Within the noble city of Bubastis, is a Temple dedicated to the goddess Bubastis, called in Greek Diana. Although there are other Temples larger, none is comparable in grace. The city is in the form of an island enclosed by two streams of the Nile River. Each is a hundred feet broad, with banks on both sides lined with fair branched trees, overshadowing the waters with a cool and pleasant shade. The city is high and the Temple stands as a tower in open and clear view to every part of the city. Round about is a wall graven with figures and portraits of various beasts. The inner Temple is surrounded by a high grove of trees and within the Temple is standing an image. It seems that the site of the cult was very ancient growing out of its position controlling the routes from Memphis to Sinai and on to Asia. For a long period of time it was strategically, politically, and religiously important. It is not likely that either the Jews or the Christians would have been entirely ignorant of such a cult center.

There are two other details which are of interest. "In hieroglyphs, the word *Bast* was written using a picture of a sealed oil-jar; it is possible, therefore, that the fetish originally worshipped at Bast bore a resemblance to an oil-jar" (Ibid. 192).

The second instance is from another location, and would not be considered except for the detail related to the wiping of hair. The text is from the Songs of Isis and Nephthys, sung in the Temple of Amen-Ra at Thebes by two priestesses who personified the two goddesses:

> Hail, thou lord of the underworld, thou Bull of those who are therein, thou Image of Ra-Harmachis, thou Babe of appearance, come thou to us in peace.
>
> Thou didst repel thy disasters, thou didst drive away evil hap; Lord come to us in peace.
>
> In-nefer, lord of food, thou chief, thou who art of terrible majesty, thou God, president of the gods, when thou dost inundate the land all things are engendered.
>
> Thou art gentler than the gods. The emanations of thy body make the dead and the living to live, O thou lord of food, thou prince of green herbs, thou mighty lord, thou staff of life, thou giver of offerings to the gods, and of sepulchral meals to the blessed dead.
>
> Thy soul flieth after Ra, thou shinest at dawn, thou settest at twilight, thou risest every day; thou shalt rise on the left hand of Atmu for ever and ever.
>
> Thou are the glorious one, the vicar of Ra; the company of the gods cometh to thee invoking thy face, the flame whereof reacheth unto thine enemies.
>
> We rejoice when thou gatherest together thy bones, and when thou hast made whole thy body daily. Anubis cometh to thee, and the two sisters (Isis and Nephthys) come to thee. They have obtained beautiful things for thee, and they gather together thy limbs for thee, and they seek to put together the mutilated members of thy body.
>
> Wipe thou the impurities which are on them upon our hair and come thou to us having no recollection of that which hath caused thee sorrow.
>
> Come thou in thy attribute of Prince of the earth, lay aside thy trepidation and be at peace with us, O Lord. Thou shalt be proclaimed heir of the world, and the One god, and the fulfiller of the designs of the gods.

> All the gods invoke thee, come therefore to thy temple and be not afraid. O Ra (Osiris), thou art beloved of Isis and Nephthys; rest thou in thy habitation for ever (E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*. New York: Dover, 1959. 1:106–107).

What are some possible conclusions or questions which we can draw from this material? We can say it has nothing to do with the story of the woman anointing Jesus' feet, that the Gospel writers are describing an event in the life of Jesus which his followers remembered, and that, if there are some teasing relationships of actions, symbols, and meaning, these are purely coincidental. This would be the traditional response.

Or we can say that the cultural world of which the early Christians were a part included traditions, concepts, and rituals associated with the cult of Osiris, Baste, and others, which may have entered into their conscious or unconscious interpretation of an event associated with Jesus and the woman.

Or we can say, without being able to prove this direction anymore than we can prove the others, that consciously or unconsciously, the story or the pericope, while perhaps referring to a particular remembered event in the life of Jesus, seems laden with connotations, structures, and symbols which are not inconsistent with the tradition. On the contrary, they reinforce the principal motifs of triumph over demons, healing, new life, and resurrection, precisely those qualities associated with new life in Christ through baptism and the Eucharist. What Paul describes in didactic and theological language, we have here in a narrative somewhat cryptic unless we enter into the baptismal-Eucharistic community from which the Gospels come.

What if we hypothesize a more conscious awareness among the new Christians of the cultic life associated with Osiris and Baste? The Gospel tradition seems to make clear the importance of a woman who was healed of demons, instructed, called to faith, who anoints Jesus, who is associated in a particular way with his death and resurrection. Whether this is one woman, or several, whether the stories are separate or conflated, has always been a puzzle. Have the Christian communities appropriated some of the symbols of the Osiris-Baste cult as appropriate interpretations

of their experience of new life in Christ? Indeed, Jesus himself is certainly imbued by the importance of casting out demons, of healing, of calling to faith, of the importance of rituals of water, of the importance and equality of women, of transformation through death into new life.

More specifically, to return to the alabaster flask as a key, were some of the early Christians converts from the cult of Baste? Just south of the Sea of Galilee was another large Temple dedicated to cult worship of an Egyptian goddess. Was the alabaster oil jar, associated with magical powers of triumph over demons, of healing, and of movement from death into new life, so important that it found a new freedom by becoming associated with the anointing of Jesus? Was there a ritual which involved washing and anointing of the head or the feet and wiping with hair as a symbol of the sun? Was the alabaster jar and all the cult associated with it transformed into an instrumental symbol of baptism into new life? Jesus is the new Temple. Each baptized person is a Temple of the spirit, not made with hands. A new simplicity has replaced the complexity of cultic life associated with the dominant Temples of their experience. In the presence of Jesus, especially in the context of a meal of thanksgiving, there is forgiveness, healing, and movement from death to new life.

This is one of the Lukan stories in which a woman or women are given prominence and a male figure or men come off badly. In the unfolding of the story, the woman moves from being a sinner, an intruder, an outsider, one not even allowed into the meal, to being the one associated intimately with Jesus, to being the one who anoints Jesus, the one explicitly forgiven and commended for her faith.

In contrast are the male figures. In Mark and Matthew the meal is at the home of Simon the leper. Luke identifies Simon as one of the Pharisees. In Matthew, it is the disciples who are indignant at the waste of money. In Mark, it is merely "some" who are indignant. In Luke, the foil is the host, who thinks that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know that the woman is a sinner.

Although the Pharisee had not voiced the question, Jesus answers with a riddle unique to Luke. Thus far Luke had not named the Pharisee. Now he describes a dialogue, using the same name

Simon with which Mark and Matthew begin the account. They place the story at Bethany in the house of Simon, the leper. Luke mentions neither Bethany nor the word leper. This is surprising since at first sight both would seem to fit Luke's purposes. Perhaps he wanted to avoid confusion with the leper who had been healed.

At any rate, Jesus says, "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon answers: "Teacher *(didaskale)*, say." Jesus' riddle tells of two debtors who were creditors to a certain person. The one owed five hundred *dēnaria,* the other fifty. Since neither could repay, he freely forgave them. Jesus then asks: "Which one will love him more?" Simon answers rather cagily, "I suppose the one to whom he freely forgave more." Jesus answers: "You judged rightly" (Luke 7:40-43).

There is a tongue-in-cheek irony in Jesus saying, "You judged rightly *(orthōs)*" to the Pharisee since some Pharisees prided themselves on their orthodox judgements. There are other elements which tease our imaginations. First is an intriguing and perhaps cryptic assonance. "Debtors" in the Greek is *chreopheiletai.* He "freely forgave" is *echarisato.* Are the debtors "lovers of Christ"? Is the free forgiveness of Christ "Eucharist"?

In addition, we are reminded first of the dialogue in John's Gospel between Jesus and Simon also called Peter in the context of Jesus washing the disciples feet, of Peter's lack of faith, and of Peter's testimonial of love.

We are also reminded of the pericope at the end of John's Gospel in which Simon Peter is asked three times if he loves Jesus and he replies, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you" (John 21:15-17). Simon's love moves from a questionable status to one that is affirmed: "Feed my sheep." In Luke's story Simon does not understand the woman's action of faith and love. He can only note within himself that evidently Jesus does not know she is a sinner. If Jesus were a prophet he would know what kind of woman this is and that a sinner is touching him.

The verb for touching *(haptetai)* is from the same root as the verb in John's resurrection story: "Do not touch *(haptou)* me" (John 20:17). It can have sexual overtones, in the sense of embracing, or even intercourse. (Paul uses it in a negative way.) It is

surprising that it is the woman who is touching the man Jesus. But this, of course, explains why the Pharisee is shocked at Jesus' apparent lack of awareness.

The word for sinner *(hamartōlos)* is usually defined as one who deviates from the path of virtue or who misses the mark. It is interesting to note that it is the opposite of *martys* (a witness) and its variants such as *martyrion* (testimony). This points to another twist of the ironic for the hearers of Luke's Gospel. Ironically, the one who misses the mark is right on target! The one who is a sinner moves through faith and love to be, perhaps, witness of the resurrection. He has judged rightly that the one to whom more was forgiven loves more. In other words, in this case, the woman loves more.

Then Jesus turns toward the woman but says to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Now Jesus repeats and affirms the actions of the woman in contrast to the lack of action on the part of Simon. If there is some influence from the community's tradition of contrasting the woman as faithful witness and the man Simon Peter as doubting, this comment reinforces the contrast:

> "I entered into your house.
> You gave no water for my feet.
> This woman with her tears
> has washed my feet
> and with the hairs of her head
> has wiped them.
>
> "You gave me no kiss
> but this woman from the time I entered
> has not stopped
> fervently kissing my feet.
>
> "You did not anoint my head with oil
> but this woman with ointment
> has anointed my feet.
>
> "So I tell you:
> Her many sins have been forgiven
> because she loved much.
>
> "But to whom little is forgiven,
> he loves little" (Luke 7:44-47).

There is a rhythm of sound in three words *hamartiai* (sins or lack of witness), *apheōntai* (have been forgiven), and *agapa* (he or she loves), or *ēgapēsen* (she loved). Sin dies or departs through love.

Then Jesus speaks to the woman: "Your sins have been forgiven." Those reclining with Jesus do not speak to the woman, but reason among themselves: "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:48-49).

In a way all the stories in this section have been arranged to lead to this question. The healing of the centurion's servant, the raising of the widow's son, the contrast with John the Baptist, the woman washing the feet of Jesus—all testify that a great prophet has risen among us. The people of Jesus' time ask: "Who is this who even forgives sin?" So do the early Christians in their community rituals, including the Eucharist. So do the hearers of the good news today. Who is this who even forgives sins? It is the outsider centurion, the widow, and the woman labeled a sinner who are aware of their unworthiness, who understand, who love, and who are thereby forgiven. Jesus says to the woman: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Salvation has already been accomplished.

PART THREE:
PARABLES AND SIGNS

1

THE PARABLES

Luke 8

Luke alone among the Gospel writers places the parable of the sower in the context of the women who ministered to Jesus. He begins the section by telling that Jesus journeyed through every city and village proclaiming *(kēryssōn)* and preaching *(euangelizomenos)* the kingdom *(basileian)* of God. Almost as an afterthought is the phrase added "and the twelve with him" (Luke 8:1). One is tempted to think it is not only an afterthought but even perhaps a later addition. Several verses which describe the ministering women precede the gathering of the crowd.

These women had been healed from evil spirits and infirmities (Luke 8:2). The juxtaposition of these words provides insight to the cultural world view. Infirmities are associated with evil spirits. If one is infirm or has an unexplainable disease, it may well be attributed to an evil demon. From Mary Magdalen, clearly an outstanding woman in the Gospel traditions, seven demons had gone out. Today we think of multiple personalities, seven, twenty-four, or more, which are indeed overwhelming oppressions. Other women mentioned are Joanna, wife of Chusa and Susanne and many others. The mention of Joanna is unique to Luke. Is Joanna a feminine parallel for John?

We are interested in this woman Joanna, wife of Chusa. She is also mentioned in Luke's resurrection story: "Now it was Mary Magdalen and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the

other women with them who told the apostles. But these words seemed to them as idle tales and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:11).

Joanna is named as wife of Chusa steward of Herod. The Herod connection leads us to Acts 13, also written by Luke:

> Now there were in Antioch among the existing church prophets and teachers both Barnabas and Simeon called Black, and Luke the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit said: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then having fasted and prayed and laying their hands on them they sent them forth (Acts 13:1-3).

Could Manaen, a foster brother, probably raised with Herod, also be known by or connected to Herod's steward? It is entirely possible. We are reminded of the young Moses and the young Pharaoh. Is Luke the Cyrenean living in Antioch, where followers of Jesus were first called Christian, possibly Luke the writer of Luke-Acts? The name Luke is not otherwise mentioned in Luke-Acts. If so, this provides a link not only to Paul but to the Mary's and perhaps to Joanna and the news from the court of Herod.

So in Luke's context, we have the assembly of Jesus with these various named women who ministered *(diēkonoun)* to them out of their possessions (Luke 8:3), with the twelve, who are not named here, and the large group of people. Then Jesus tells the parable of the sower. The parable is commentary on those assembled.

> "The one sowing went forth to sow his seed
> And in his sowing
> this seed fell by the way
> and was trodden down
> and the birds of the heaven devoured it" (Luke 8:5).

At one level we have a homey story using rural images to provoke thought. But the primacy of this parable, as well as a careful reading, raises interesting questions. Our first question is: What does it mean to fall by the way? The way for Jesus and his followers is the way of God: from Isaiah's "Prepare the way of the

Lord" to Jesus' description of John: "This is he of whom it was written: 'Behold I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you'" (Luke 7:27). Followers of Jesus were called followers of the way before they were called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Luke is the only one who adds "and was trodden down" (Luke 8:5). The word is *katepatēthē*. If to walk *(peripatei)* with Jesus on the way was as one of his disciples, then perhaps *katepatēthē* suggests the opposite. This seed symbolizes those who not only do not walk with Jesus on the way but who destructively trod on the seed to prevent its flowering.

The word for birds is *peteina*—a play on words with *pateō*—"walk." Luke adds "of the heaven," reminding his hearers of the destructive busy body crow-like mythological and ritualistic connotation of those who prey on the innocent. These birds devour *(katephagen)* the seed.

The sowing itself is a beautiful image. The one sowing *(speirōn)* went forth *(exēlthen)* to sow *(speirai)* his seed *(sporon)*. The first two words have the root from which our word "spiral" comes. Many seeds spiral down. They often have wing like constructions which carry them on the air but which also create a spiraling path. The arm movement of the sower is also a spiral movement as, for example, a woman casting the seeds out from a basket or from an apron. The spiral structure is basic to the universe, from the unique fingerprint of each person to the galaxies of which our world is a part.

The spiral was evidently also a way of thinking, teaching, and writing for Christians, Jews, and Greeks. A psalm, a parable, or a Gospel often has an infrastructure which starts with a word or image and spirals around constantly moving in a centrifugal, centripetal pattern to elucidate the thought and the images. That is what is happening in this parable. The meaning of each subsequent set of words and images extends those laid down before.

The second image of sowing describes seed which fell down *(katepesen)* on the rock *(petran)* (Luke 8:6). Luke alone adds the element of the falling *down* and his use of *petran* "rock" is surprisingly different from the other Synoptics' "rocky place" *(petrōdes)*. The use of *petran*, "rock," "peter," makes one ask if this

is a hidden allusion to the followers of Peter, suggesting the kinds of differences and criticism made explicit in a number of pericopes in Acts in which Peter is criticized for his hebraicizing insularity.

Matthew describes the earth here as lacking depth and the seed as scorched because of dried up root (Matt 13:6). Luke simply says it withered because of lack of moisture *(ikmada)*. Why moisture? Just for simplicity or style? Or is there an allusion to the waters of baptismal rituals? Does this group of seed lack this water?

The third group fell among thorns (Luke 8:7). As the seed is growing up, the thorns choke it. The act of choking is strangulation, the cutting off of the source of air, wind, and breath. Such an act is the opposite of giving air, breath, and spirit. The thorns choke off the movement of the spirit.

And lastly, other seed fell in the good soil and when it was grown it produced fruit a hundred fold (Luke 8:8). Soil *(gē)* is the earth, the ground, the world, and by extension, the inhabitants of the earth. It is also, of course, the ancient "mother earth," the female principle of fertility, the earth goddess who nourishes and brings forth all life. The good seed falls into the womb of the one who nourishes, the community which gives life. When that seed has fully developed, it in turn creates fruit a hundred fold. We are reminded of Elizabeth crying out to Mary: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb." To bring forth fruit is to bring forth Christ, to bring forth life, to bring forth the fruit of the lips (Heb 13:15) which is the praise of God.

The parable is a call to discipleship, as well as a sad commentary on those who did not follow the way of true discipleship, a cautionary description of the pitfalls of alternative ways, and a promise of the fruit of Christ which the mothering community will bring forth from her womb.

The disciples do not understand. The sentence is a contradiction. Disciples should understand. The irony pervades the Gospel that those called disciples, who should understand, do not. The hearers of the Gospel in the growing Christian community can identify with the disciples who do not understand. As they grow they can also relish the irony that, whereas the disciples did not understand, in their mothering community they are growing to understand and, in fact, do know the mysteries of the Kingdom.

This is the answer of Jesus: "To you has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables, that

> "seeing they may not see, and
> hearing they may not understand" (Luke 8:10).

Such a contradiction. The enigma of their experience, but also the mystery of spiritual seeing. Seeing and hearing are not just the physical acts. Seeing is directing the eyes and the mind toward the person, the way, or the object being considered. This fullness of seeing also implies that one will pay attention to, hear, and take heed. It is a way of commitment calling for response.

Similarly, to hear is to listen to, heed, obey, and understand, in other words, the way of discipleship.

So that Jesus says: "Now here is the parable" (Luke 8:11-15). This is—here and now—the parable. There may be a pun on the word "this" *(estin)* and the word for banqueting, feasting, eating and drinking *(esthiō)*. In the community of disciples is the parable, for "the seed *(sporos)* is the word *(logos)* of God *(theou)*." *Sporos* is not only the physical seed but an investment toward a future harvest. *Logos,* of course, is the ancient Greek word for meaning, eternal meaning, meaning for the ages, and by extension, the creative Word of God, the connotation also identified with Jesus. Jesus is the seed of God sown in the Christian community.

Those persons by the wayside are those who are hearing but the devil *(diabolos)* comes and takes the word from their hearts, lest believing they may be saved. *Diabolos* is a force of contradiction—*bolos:* a throwing, and *dia:* through, so that for Luke, the verb suggests an accusation (Luke 16:1), a defamation, an informing against, even a treacherous informer or a traitor.

The ones on the rock *(petras)* are those who when they hear receive the word with joy but they do not have root. They believe for a time but in the time of trial they withdraw. Interestingly, this is also a description of Peter's action during the passion, and by extension, of all those who act in a similar way in difficult times. What irony that those who fall on the rock *(petras)* are those who defect! The roots of the words "time of trial" *(kairō peirasmou)* are also those Luke uses in 4:13 to describe the temptation of Jesus.

The word for "withdraw" is one which comes to be associated with defection and apostasy.

Those who are falling in the thorns are the ones who, while they are listening, at the same time are going through the cares and riches and pleasures of life, so they are choked and do not bring forth fruit.

In contrast is the seed in the good soil *(kalē gē)*. Matthew describes the seed sown on good soil as one who hears the Word and understands. For Mark they are the ones who hear the Word and accept it, but for Luke the good seed are those who in a worthy heart *(kardia kalē)* and good hearing *(agathē akousantes)* hold fast the Word and bring forth fruit *(karpophorousin)* in patience (Luke 8:15).

The abundance of repetition, assonance, and contrast point to a formulaic expression of a community treasuring its oral tradition, savoring the words, meditating on them, and bringing to expression a life giving teaching. The meaning has multiple levels and describes the way of discipleship, as well as the mystery of those who walk the journey but who do not bring forth fruit.

The seed is the Word of God. Bringing forth fruit is bringing forth a profession of faith which brings salvation, a word which in Hebrew signifies Jesus. So this parable, at one level, is a simple agricultural story, but at another level it is a commentary on the variety of followers, most of whom do not continue as followers, and who therefore do not bring forth fruit.

But at still another level, the story describes the mystical faith journey of those who indeed become disciples, in whom the seed of the Word of God, in whom Jesus the Word, is sown in such mothering earth that believing brings forth the reality of Jesus the Savior.

Images of Light

In the next section three sayings of Jesus are grouped together around the images of light and response (Luke 8:16-18). We can picture a lamp being put on a stand to give light to all in the house. But why is this contrasted with putting a lighted lamp under a bed or a couch? Is this an image of the ridiculous so that

as hearers we say: Of course not! Or is there more punning going on at another level related to words that were achieving ritual connotations? By the time of the writing of John's Gospel John the Baptist is called a lamp or a light *(lychnos)* burning and shining (John 5:35). Whatever the possibilities, there is a light *(phōs)* to be seen, and in contrast to the exclusiveness of the Gnostic concept of the initiated elect, one should not hide or cover the light, but put the lamp on the lampstand so that those coming in may see the light. Anything hidden, cryptic, or apocryphal will be known.

Luke 8:18 includes a wonderful play on words: See how you hear! These two acts which most people consider separate are intimately related. We are to see how we hear. Persons who lose their physical sight are surprised at how much that interferes with their hearing. In one way, their hearing is sharpened. But in another way, much hearing is dependent on visual clues, so the nonseeing person realizes that hearing is also impaired.

Each of the sayings seems to build on the ones which have preceded. The first calls for holding the lamp on high so that all those coming can see. The second makes it clear that this light of the witnessing disciple is to be held out to all. Then the linkage is made to the relationship of seeing and hearing: a power which is a gift that grows by use. The verb *echē* is usually translated simply "has." "Whoever has, to that one it will be given; whoever has not, even what one seems to have will be taken away" (Luke 8:18). The ordinary reader presumes "has" refers to possessions, but the Greek is in the context of being seized, of being possessed, of having power by reason of closeness. So it seems that the ones holding forth the light and responding to what they hear at the same time find the gift of the possession by God's power increasing. In contrast is the weakening of the power in those who use it less.

The sayings seem to be illustrated by the short narrative which follows in the next three verses. Jesus' mother and brothers come to him, but they can't get near because of the crowd. It is reported to him that his mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see him. He answers with the somewhat shocking saying: "My mother and my brothers are the ones hearing and doing the Word of God" (Luke 8:21). We are tempted to interpret the saying as a

put down of his mother and brothers, but that seems to contradict the tradition which honors Mary. The saying seems rather to climax the previous sayings by showing the closeness of those who hear and do the Word of God. Not only do the disciples bring light, not only do their seeing and hearing increase their growing in the way God possesses them, but indeed, by hearing and doing the Word of God, they become family, blood relations, bonded in loyalty. The saying does not exclude his mother and brothers. On the contrary, they are the ones hearing and doing the Word of God.

"Hearing" *(akouontes)* and "doing" *(poiountes)* are powerful words in Luke. "Hearing" is listening with such attention and commitment that wholehearted response is simultaneous. The word usually translated "doing" is the power of creating, the power of the great things God can do.

How might women disciples in the Lukan community respond to these sayings? The mother of Jesus is one hearing and doing the Word of God. If she and others as women disciples stand forth as lamps to let the light shine forth to enlighten all those coming in, if they let the hidden be made known, if they see and hear in such a way as to let the power of God increase in them, then they will be bonded to Jesus as those hearing and doing the Word of God as blood relations in irrevocable covenant. Women today are called to similar empowerment and relationship.

The rest of the chapter is a sequence of narratives, each holding up a miracle showing the power of Jesus, his power over the forces of nature, his power over demons, his power over sickness, even women's sickness, and his power over death. Each is illustration of the "doing," the creating and the empowerment referred to in the saying. Each is a call to faith with increasing urgency and power of demonstration. Each also describes a new level of discipleship.

2

STORIES OF POWER AND HEALING

The first narrative in this section is that of Jesus calming the storm (Luke 8:22-25). Jesus and his disciples embark in a boat. He says: "Let us go over to the other side of the lake," and they set out on a voyage. This is what is happening to those called to discipleship. With Jesus as the faith-master, they are getting in a boat which can be tossed about on the sea. They are embarking to the "other side." They launch forth!

But jeopardy strikes! As they are sailing, Jesus falls asleep. Then a huge storm of wind comes down on the lake. That is not enough: They are filling up and are in danger. It happens fast, and each stage is worse than the last. Those becoming disciples experience similar difficulties in their way of discipleship. They approach him and wake him up, saying, "Master, we are perishing!" The word for "master" is *epistata,* "faith-master." There is a play on words between "faith" *(pistis)* and "faith-master" *(epistata)* and also perhaps between "lake" *(limnēn)* and "we are perishing" *(appollymetha).* But when he is awakened he rebukes the wind and the roughness of the water, and they cease and there is a great calm. Then he says to them: "Where is your faith *(pistis)*?" They are astonished. "Who is this who commands even the wind and water and they obey him?" (Luke 8:24-25).

The second call-to-faith narrative shows the power of Jesus over demons (Luke 8:26-40). As Jesus and the disciples go into

the country of the Gerasenes, a foreign land, opposite Galilee, a man coming out of the city meets him. The man is oppressed by demons. He lives not in a house, but among the tombs. He breaks the chains with which others try to hold him. For a long time he has worn no clothes. Today we recognize a description of what we usually call mental illness, but we also have the phenomenon of persons possessed who sometimes are healed after an exorcism. By whatever name or cause, we have a human phenomenon of suffering and a power more horrendous even than that of wind and water churning up a lake. The demon recognizes Jesus: "What have I to do with you, Jesus son of God most high? Don't torment me!" Jesus charges the unclean spirit to go out of the man (Luke 8:28-29).

Jesus asks of the demon: "What is your name?" The answer is "Legion," because there are many demons in the man. In the world view of the time, the demons had to go into another being. They could not just be expelled. A herd of swine was feeding nearby. Swine were anathema to Jews, and symbolically appropriate beings for demons. So Jesus allows the demons to go into the swine, which then rush headlong down the precipice into the lake, and they choke or are drowned. Those who had been feeding the pigs run into the city and to the farms to tell what has happened; so the people come to see what has happened, and they are astonished to find the man clothed, in his right senses, and sitting at the feet of Jesus. The people of the Gerasenes are frightened by what they see and beg Jesus to go away from them, so he embarks in a boat. But the man who was healed begs to go with Jesus. Jesus tells him instead to return to his house and relate what things God did to him. And he went away and proclaimed how much Jesus had done for him (Luke 8:30-39).

The story raises many questions for us. There are words linked by sound and direction: Jesus is going out, the man is going out, the demons are going out, the swine-feeders, the townspeople, the farmers are all going out. Do these provide oral devices for remembering the story? Are they just descriptive words characteristic of such a narrative? Or are there elements of exodus riding on the structure? What about the word "legion"? Does it just mean a large number? Or is there a veiled allusion to the Roman

legions and the oppression they brought to the land? How would Luke's community hear this story? Are there symbolic values related to the process of discipleship? Is there reference to an underlying ritual of the expelling of demons, especially the demons associated with tombs and death? There certainly is a demonstration of the power of healing which presents the man in the role of a listening disciple, who then is commissioned to go to his own people and tell the great things which God has done.

How would a woman hear these two stories? As one called to discipleship, and aware of her own vulnerability and weakness within the cultural context, she would be called to faith and courage by the demonstration of the power of Jesus over the natural elements of wind and water on the hazards of the sea. Wind and water are presented as powerful forces of destruction, but Jesus calms them, and wind and water—symbols of spirit (Hebrew *ruach;* Greek *pneuma*) and baptism—become forces subject to his command.

What would a woman think of the story of the man with many demons? First, it was probably a physical description not foreign to her experience. As mother, as sister, as nurse, she was probably only too aware of the aberrations of sickness, demons, and violent behavior. In the life of the spirit, Jesus has power over, not only the forces of nature but also over those dehumanizing and oppressive powers which seem to be outside the physical and the human domains. Jesus exorcises such demons, even though they be legion, and brings healing, calm, discipleship, and even the commissioning to spread the good news to others. For women as well as for men, this is a call to freedom. If there is an allusion to the Roman legions, women would have felt a sense of liberation. Women are often victims of soldiers stationed in a foreign country. To send the legions, of whatever demonic driven character, into the sea could only mean for these hearers freedom from evil and the beginning of new life.

Two Healing Stories of Women

The next section weaves together two stories, the one of a young woman twelve years of age, the other a woman who for

twelve years had suffered from a flow of blood (Luke 8:41-56). It is intriguing to see how the two stories are woven together in the Synoptic tradition. There seem to be some mnemonic aspects of the structure which hold the stories together. The *n* and/or *g* sounds in the word *synagōgē* are echoed in the words for "daughter" *(thygatēr),* "only born" *(monogenēs),* "pressed upon" *(synepnigon),* "woman" *(gynē),* "synagogue ruler" *(archisynagōgou),* and their repetitions. The first woman, the daughter of Jairus, is at the onset of menses. She is at the beginning of womanhood, a new woman. The other woman, we may speculate, is at the other end of the physical generative cycle, perhaps menopause. At least, she has spent twelve years going to doctors in the hope of healing the condition which no doubt not only weakened her but interfered with her normal activities.

Jesus has just returned from the other side of the lake, from calming the waters, and from healing the man with the demons. Now he is met by the crowd (Luke 8:40). The word "crowd" *(ochlos)* is characterized by disorder. It is a confused multitude, a tumult, an uproar, even a mob. This is perhaps in contrast to another often used word for "people" *(laos),* which is the family, the tribal group, in the New Testament the People of God. The crowd welcomes him in expectation. Jairus approaches Jesus. Although Jairus is a ruler of the synagogue, his name suggests origins outside the traditional boundaries of Israel. He falls at the feet of Jesus, a gesture of respect and supplication. We are reminded of the woman with the ointment and of Jesus in the Gospel of John washing the feet of the disciples.

Jairus asks Jesus to come into his house *(oikon)* (Luke 8:41) because his only born daughter is dying. To the Israelites, as well as to many other groups, an only born is uniquely important, has a unique identity with the parent. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the only begotten. Here the only begotten is a daughter. This surprises us—not "only begotten son," but "only begotten daughter." Jesus goes with Jairus, and as he goes, the crowds press upon him.

In the crowd is the woman who has hemorrhaged for twelve years (Luke 8:43). If Luke indeed was a physician, we can understand his eliminating Mark's telling description of the woman: "and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had

spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26). Luke does say: "She was not able to be healed by anyone" (Luke 8:43).

How many women can identify with this woman: those who have conditions which physicians or other healers are unable to help. The woman has spent twelve years trying to find healing. Twelve years is a long time. On the one hand, the young woman is at the beginning of menstruation, on the threshold of life, and yet she is dying. Now we see an older woman who should be at the fullness of her womanhood, but who nevertheless is oppressed, not only by her weakness but also by her inability to be healed. In addition, because of the flow of blood she is unclean and thereby ostracized from all social interaction.

Although Jairus and most men approach Jesus from the front, a position of dignity, this woman who is also unclean approaches from behind and touches the fringe—perhaps the border or the tassel—of his garment. She is doing that which is illegal and ordinarily offensive. What a contradiction: Immediately she receives the blessing and the flow of blood stops. The healing is simultaneous with the illegal touching. Although he has not seen her, Jesus knows he has been touched. "Who is the one who is touching me?" (Luke 8:45).

The question is enigmatic, because everyone is pressing upon him, jostling him in the style of a mob. "Who is the one touching me?" is an illogical and loaded question.

The audience of the Gospel story is on the inside: There are so many ironies: Jesus knows who is touching him. The Christian community knows precisely that Jesus was often touched by people, that he touched them, that they were often healed by that touch, and that Christians in the continuing tradition would touch and be touched in the healing process. Yet here it is not the case first of Jesus touching someone, but of that person—a woman at that—touching him.

What of the fringes, or the bottom of the garment? (Luke 8:44). Was this the fringe which is sign of the male Hebrew dedicated to God? Is this woman touching the sign characteristic of the male worshiper? The answer to the question of Jesus comes from the followers associated with Peter. They all deny that they

are touching Jesus. In so doing they betray themselves. Peter, the man, is the great denier. In the Passion narrative Peter denies that he even knows Jesus (Luke 22:57).

Peter's statement is also ironic: "Master (*epistata*—faith teacher), the crowds press on you and jostle you" (Luke 8:45). Peter's voice is typically that of a naturalistic kind of logic. However, his unbelief serves the purpose of allowing Luke's audience also to express doubts and weaknesses, also to show their lack of belief.

Jesus responds: "Someone touched me: for I knew power *(dynamin)* went forth from me" (Luke 8:46) Jesus experiences what might be called vibes, vibrations, sensory or extra sensory dynamics.

The woman *(gynē)* sees that she is not hidden (Luke 8:47). How many women take the place of the "hidden!" They don't want to bother anyone. They are self-effacing. They put up with sickness and other sufferings, and almost in desperation, they finally reach out. This woman comes forth trembling. As audience, however, while we can sympathize with her hiddenness and self-effacement, we know that this is the opposite of what Jesus brings about and of what Jesus calls her to, and, in turn, calls all followers to.

The woman prostrates herself before him, just as the ruler of the synagogue had. In this action, the woman is paralleled with the ruler of the synagogue. She proclaims before all the people why she had touched him and how she received a cure at once (Luke 8:47).

Then we have a beautiful saying of Jesus. He addresses her as "Daughter" *(thygatēr)*—title of honor, as in "Daughter of Israel." Jesus speaks to her with great respect. He attributes the healing to her power! to her faith! "Your faith has healed you." The irony is strong: Peter called Jesus "faith-master" *(epistata)*, but it is the woman who has the faith *(pistis)*; it is the woman who reaches out in faith, and whose faith heals her. Jesus sends her forth: "Your faith has made you whole," has brought you salvation, has brought you Jesus. "Go in peace" *(eirēnēn)* (Luke 8:48).

The first narrative is now picked up again. The narrator communicates the sense of continuing action. "While he was yet speaking . . . ." (Luke 8:49). Someone comes from the synagogue ruler's house—(symbolically from the synagogue?)—saying that the

daughter has died. The word daughter *(thygatēr)* links the oral tradition of weaving the two stories together. The messenger says not to trouble the teacher, but Jesus hears the message too and immediately repeats what has become a powerful formula:

> "Do not fear.
> Only believe.
> And she will be made whole" (Luke 8:50).

When Jesus reaches the house he allows only Peter, John, and James and the father and mother of the child *(paidos)* to go in with him. *Paidos* suggests someone who is learning.

Outside all are weeping and bewailing, family, friends, servants, and probably also official mourners. The funeral rites have already started. Jesus speaks to them:

> "Don't weep.
> She did not die.
> She is only sleeping" (Luke 8:52).

No wonder they ridicule him: They know that she indeed has died. Jesus holds her hand and calls out *(ephōnēsen)* saying: "Child *(pais)*, arise" *(egeire)* (Luke 8:54).

Her spirit *(pneuma)* returns to her, and she rises up at once. Jesus commands that she be given something to eat. The parents are amazed, but he tells them to tell no one what had happened.

The strength of the oral tradition of Jesus as healer comes through. Evidently he healed not only sicknesses and possession by demons, but he even restores the spirit to one who has died. Jesus calls forth wholeness and life, even against the powers of sickness and death.

The story has overtones of a ritual of physical healing that has taken on the ritual qualities of a call to discipleship and a call to life in the Spirit.

The ruler of the synagogue is president of the assembly. His is the concern for the physical and spiritual life of all in the assembly or the gathering, which is what the word synagogue means. The word for "child" or "young person" is *pais,* one who is a learner, one who is heir. It is used here of the twelve-year-old girl. It was used in Zacharias' song in speaking of David, as well as of

John, who would be prophet of the most high. The word *pais* is also used in the story of Simeon. The parents bring into the Temple the child *(paidion)* Jesus (Luke 2:27). Later the child *(paidion)* grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on him (Luke 2:40). Jesus is *pais* in the fullness of what child of God, disciple, heir should be. Here is a twelve-year-old girl who is also *pais*.

In this narrative of the twelve-year-old daughter of the ruler of the assembly, we have a paradigm story of a daughter coming of age, who in the movement of a terrible contradiction has died, but whom Jesus restores to life. Once the spirit returns, she eats. She partakes of the food blessed in the community.

So we have two stories, one of a woman on the threshold of adult life. She has died before she can fully begin life in community. Jesus restores her spirit through the faith of her parents. In the enclosed story, we have a woman who for the same number of years has been oppressed by such sickness she probably often felt she was dead or would be better off dead. The blood which should have brought life has brought the opposite. By touching Jesus the woman is restored to wholeness. Each of the two women is freed to be creator of life.

As male, Jesus understands women as well as men. Their woman sexuality is an essential part of who they are. He restores them to the fullness of the woman-life.

The call in discipleship, in sickness, even in death is:

> "Do not fear.
> only believe.
> She shall be saved" (Luke 8:50).
>
> "Child, arise.
> Eat" (Luke 8:54-55).

Women of faith understand this language. They rejoice that they are called to such faith that will bring healing.

What is the place of Peter, John, and James in this narrative? Peter is the one who does not understand. Speaking for the others, he asks, "Master, how can you say: Who touched me?" (Luke 8:45). His doubting makes him along with the older male James and the younger John excellent witnesses. They are taken into the

house. Evidently, they with the parents are objective and authoritative prime witnesses: the young woman is restored to life. Her spirit is restored and she arises.

3

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE

Luke 9

The number twelve is a memory link to the next story in which Jesus gathers the twelve and gives them power *(dynamin)* and authority *(exousian)* over all the demons and diseases in order to heal (Luke 9:1).

Why the Twelve? The twelve tribes of Israel were, of course, prototypes for the People of God, for the covenant relationship of God with his people. In new archetypes, Israel is now called to healing and to new covenant. The new relationships are now not defined as they had been in terms of land proprietorship, of wars, of treaties, or of priestly authority. On the contrary, they are defined in terms of healing and freedom from demons. The new power and authority are not in terms of money and possessions. Rather, disciples are to take nothing for the way, not even the basics of staff, wallet, or bread, not to mention silver or extra clothes. They are people of the road. They stay where the Spirit leads them. What do they have to give? Good news and healing.

Were these twelve men? Tradition holds them so. Was it a matter of cultural codes that Jesus' companions were male as he was? Probably. In a way, this makes it even more remarkable that the example and the call which Jesus gives them so often involves the respect of, healing of, and friendship with women.

However, there do seem to be two contradictory threads running through the Gospel of Luke, the one thread giving prominence to women, the other giving the prominence to men. The interweaving is complex and often reflects inconsistency. The question rises: Is the contradiction one stemming from the cultural world as well as from the personal valuing of Jesus? An alternate question is: Does some Lukan material reflect two different sources, one a women's tradition, the other a men's tradition? As one story is placed against another the question becomes the more intriguing. Does Luke place the two sources of traditions one after the other and let them stand in parallel, in contradiction or wholeness? Did women disciples meet separately and develop their own commentaries or *Midrash* tradition?

> "And into whatever house you enter, remain there and go forth from there. And as many as do not receive you, go forth from that city and shake off the dust from your feet for a witness against them" (Luke 9:4-5).

Although this passage describes the missioning of the Twelve, we should ask the question: Did women go with them? Were women the support system, as in the missions of Jesus? Did women stay in the same houses? Did they participate in the decisions to depart if they were not received well? Did women too go "throughout the villages evangelizing and healing everywhere?" (Luke 9:6). It seems likely that the answer is yes in each case, although this pericope does not refer explicitly to women.

Herod

Interjected at this point is reference to Herod, the tetrarch, who heard of all these things and was perplexed because some said that John was raised from the dead (Luke 9:7). The relationship of death-life-resurrection is a continuing theme for Luke. After the various healings described previously climaxing in the raising of the daughter of Jairus, Luke moves us closer to the coming death-resurrection of Jesus. Through the perspective of Herod, we hear rumor that John the Baptist is risen from the dead. Others say

that Elias has appeared; still others that a certain prophet of the ancients rose again.

The question of resurrection is raised in three perspectives. First, has John the Baptist risen? Herod knows that he beheaded John. He is witness to a complete death. This was a question, no doubt, not only for Herod, but also for the continuing followers of the Baptist, as well as for the followers of Jesus. Elias is a second type of transcending death. The tradition was that Elias was taken up into the heavens (2 Kgs 2:11) and would come again as precursor to the Messiah. The third reference is to a certain prophet of the ancients. Although the prophet is not named, in a narrative to come of the transfiguration, two prophets will be with Jesus: Moses and Elias, so it is possible that the veiled reference here is to Moses, the great prophet of the exodus from slavery and the journey to the promised land. Herod asks the question for all of us: "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9:9). Herod seeks to see him, and ironically, as a foil character, draws the audience to ask the same question and also to seek to see one risen from the dead.

We are left hanging as the narrative continues, and we see a side of Jesus that seems to contradict the expectations just raised. The apostles, those who were sent, return and are telling Jesus what things they did. Jesus takes them apart to the city of Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). The paradox continues: The crowd follows him. Jesus welcomes them and speaks about the kingdom of God. It is only Luke who provides here the context of Jesus speaking about the kingdom of God. Are the resurrection questions placed in the context of the kingdom?

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

The strength of the tradition of the story of the feeding of the five thousand points to a remembered event of those who followed Jesus. But the story as we have it has taken on overtones of a Eucharistic celebration. In spite of its stark simplicity which is noticeable and deliberate, the meal is the banquet meal of the kingdom. Although near a city, the place is a deserted area. The time clue is that of the evening meal, also the time of prayer: "The

day began to decline." The theme of "the Twelve" continues in this section. The Twelve say to Jesus: "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go around the villages and farms to find lodging and provisions,—because we are in a desert place" (Luke 9:12).

"Lodging" and "provisions" are somewhat ironic in tone. These are people on the road. They have come out to see Jesus. Lodgings and provisions are not what they are looking for. Characteristically, the Twelve provide the foil of not understanding, of making the logical but erroneous judgement. The two words may also be ironic in the punning sense. Besides "lodging," *katalysōsin* suggests from its etymology a letting loose of a halter, which would be the nomad's premise for what was expanded to the concept of lodging. Such a "letting loose" is what is called for in the simplicity of discipleship. The root of the word also means "to dissolve." A near-sound word is *katallassōn,* which suggests "reconciling" or "restoring to favor." The word is also used for a dining room such as was prepared for the Last Supper.

The companion word "provisions" *(episitismon)* even in the English suggests the opposite of what a disciple is called to. A disciple is not called to put in provisions; on the contrary, the call is not even to take a second set of clothes or bread. The call is to trust and community. Moreover, there may be a play on words between "provisions" *(episitismon)* and "faith" *(pistis).*

Jesus' response to them in the dialogue of learning discipleship continues the irony: "You give them to eat" *(phagein)* (Luke 9:13). In the recent story of the twelve-year-old daughter, Jesus commands that she be given to eat. Once more, they do not understand. "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people." The crowd numbered about five thousand men. There have been varying interpretations of this number. The first point is that it is a very large number of persons. The typical largest unit in the Roman army was around six thousand. It seems that other military groups organized in similar ways. So the number indicates a parallel group.

Jesus tells the disciples to organize them in groups of fifty comparable to the unit in the army that would tent together and eat together. Perhaps this organizing reflects what was standard procedure with large groups and also what Jesus and his disciples

made use of for the crowds which followed Jesus. It may also reflect the organizing structure used by the early Christians, especially in their breaking of bread celebrations. At any rate, the people all recline for the meal.

> And taking the five loaves and the two fishes, looking up to heaven he blessed them and broke, and gave to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they ate and all were satisfied. And twelve baskets of fragments were taken up (Luke 9:16-17).

Whether or not the language developed at a later time, the wording and cadences are clearly Eucharistic, perhaps reflecting the language of the early Eucharistic communities.

On the other hand, there was prevalent during the era in which Jesus lived, a structure of a group of friends or companions who met regularly for meals, conversation, and mutual support. In the Hebrew tradition, as well as in others, the language would appropriately have reflected the blessing and distribution of the shared meal.

Women are not mentioned in the calling of the Twelve narrative, nor in this story of the feeding of the five thousand. Were women present? Yes. Is Luke here using a different source, more patriarchal and male oriented, which ignores the presence of women? Perhaps. We can only imagine the women who were part of the crowd, who also were part of the organizing of the fifty. Women are used to making limited quantities of food extend to a larger number. Unlike the disciples, they would not likely think immediately of going to buy food, and they certainly would not think of sending people away hungry! They understood Jesus, who always had compassion on the multitudes, who trusted that food would be supplied. We are even curious to know if those women described elsewhere as ministering to Jesus were part of the "miraculous" multiplication. It is a sensitive touch that twelve baskets of fragments were gathered up after everyone had been satisfied!

4

JESUS—PROPHET WHO SUFFERS

In the next narrative Jesus is alone praying, but the disciples are with him. Jesus questions them saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (Luke 9:18). Their answer echoes that of Herod's question. "John the Baptist. Others say Elias, and others that a certain prophet of the ancients rose again." Jesus responds: "But who do you say that I am?" The other questions have been leading up to this point.

In Luke the parallel questions have been building the suspense:

> "Are you come to destroy us?" (Luke 4:34).
> (Asked by the demons).
> "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sin but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).
> (Asked by scribes and Pharisees).
> "Who is this who forgives sin also?" (Luke 7:49).
> (Asked by those at table).
> "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9:9).
> (Asked by Herod).

Peter answers: "The Christ of God, the anointed one, the expected Messiah." It seems that Peter finally gets it right. Or are his expectations inherently contradictory and erroneous? Is Peter still expecting a triumphant Messiah, not a Messiah who suffers and dies?

The Suffering to Come

The answer which Jesus gives, charging them not to tell anyone about this acknowledgment is another ironic twist. Even if Peter has got it right, he is too early. He is rebuked and with the others told to keep this secret. Jesus charges them to tell this to no one, saying, on the contrary, that it is necessary that:

1) "The son of man
2) must suffer many things,
3) and be rejected
   by the elders
   and chief priests
   and scribes,
4) and be killed,
5) and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22).

This is the opposite of what Peter implied in his phrase: The Christ of God. It is also evidently a statement which had taken on the orality of a formula of faith by the early Christian communities.

Who is the son of man? Books and articles through the ages have attempted to answer this question. Tradition has assumed it as a title Jesus applied to himself which the early followers developed in particular directions.

What was the background out of which Jesus would have applied the name to himself? The phrase is quite common in various traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures. One of the common references is to Daniel 7:13-14:

And behold with the clouds of heaven
   there came one like a son of man
and he came to the ancient of days
   and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
   and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
   should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
   which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom is one
   that shall not be destroyed.

We can see how later reflection on Jesus, particularly, for example, in the tradition of John, may have developed a Christology of dominion such as is described here, but the passage is hardly characteristic of the generally humble attitude which Jesus assumed.

Much more consistent with the picture Jesus presents of himself in the synoptic tradition is an older and fuller tradition of the phrase. Jesus is the son of man, son of the earth, child of humanity. The phrase is used most frequently and most characteristically by Ezechiel, the prophet, who began so many of his oracles: son of man. The name is generic: son of the earth, child of humanity.

In the book of Ezechiel, the spirit of God calls and enters into the prophet. Against the background of the coming fall, destruction, and renewal of Jerusalem, its Temple, and people, the Lord continually calls Ezechiel to a particular action, and to proclamation, even to parable, and addresses the prophet as "son of man," child of humanity, and in this sense, son of adam. Ezechiel is called to proclaim messages of doom on Jerusalem, the judgment of God on the nations, God's continuing promises to his people, including the infusion of the spirit of new life into the dry bones in the valley. The rulers of Israel will be denounced as evil shepherds, and the Lord will become their shepherd and lead them into places of rest. Blessing will come and new life for Israel. There is a vision of the new Temple of the future, with streams of living water bringing life. These images of the prophet are appropriate ones against which to interpret Jesus' calling himself "son of man."

Second, the faith formula affirms that the child of the earth must suffer many things. The child shares in the brokenness of the human community, of each person born who suffers many things before he or she endures the final suffering.

But not only must the child suffer many things. He must also be:

1) rejected from or by the elders *(presbyterōn),* those leaders whose leadership should welcome and encourage those of the next generation.
2) rejected by the chief priests *(archiereōn),* those who should lead people to God, who should be bridge makers for people to find God.

3) rejected by the scribes *(grammateōn)*, those entrusted with the Scriptures, with the laws, with the teaching of the way to God.

"But more than rejection must come.
The child of the earth is to be slain
and on the third day to be raised" (Luke 9:22)

We have here a summary of the faith, and of the great mystery the followers experienced in Jesus. The third day is the day of covenant (Exod 19:16).

The next five verses are a continuing group of logia which summarize the implications for the followers of Jesus. The sayings are addressed to *"all":*

"If *anyone* wishes to come after me,
let him or let her deny the self
and take his cross or her cross daily
and let him or let her follow me" (Luke 9:23).

We are reminded of Paul's saying: "I die daily" (1 Cor 15:31). The next saying amplifies the idea with the enigma of paradox:

"For whoever wishes to save his life
will lose it,
"But whoever loses his life for my sake
will save it" (Luke 9:24).

In the second part the verb and the noun are reversed in a classic *chiasmus*. Another statement of paradox follows.

"What does it profit a person
gaining the whole world
but losing or suffering
the loss of the self?" (Luke 9:25).

The amplification continues in another vein:

"Whoever is ashamed of me and my words
the son of man will be ashamed of
when he comes in his glory
and in the glory of his father
and of the holy angels (Luke 9:26).

"But I tell you truly
there are some standing here
who by no means
may taste of death
until they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27).

How does a woman relate to any of this? A woman understands a person who is child of the earth because she brings forth each child from the earth of her womb: "son of man"—"daughter of woman"—each is fruit of her womb.

Woman also knows the reality of human suffering. Woman suffers often in the conception and bearing of the child. She suffers usually in the giving birth, as well as in all the stages of interrelationship with the child, with the father, with the community. This is not to deny all the joys, but suffering is integral to being woman.

What about rejection? Yes, woman knows rejection. By her gender she is excluded from the worlds of most men and certainly from the worlds of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes.

Woman identifies with someone who not only is rejected but who is slain. But what is this: On the third day he must be raised.

As life-giver woman is always sign of hope. She can understand the promise and the illogic. Her faith can understand the contradiction:

"The one who is to be killed
on the third day is to be raised."

She can also understand that she is included in the *all:*

"If any woman wishes to come after me,
let her deny herself
and take up her cross daily
and let her follow me.

"Whatever woman wishes to save her life
will lose it,
but whoever loses her life for my sake
will find it."

The woman too will see the kingdom of God.

The Transfiguration

Eight days later Jesus takes Peter and John and James and goes up into the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28).

Why eight days? Perhaps by the time of the telling of this story, the eighth day had become a resurrection day, and this prefigurement of resurrection would fit appropriately into that category. The eighth day is traditionally the day of the new creation, the beginning of the new era. The sayings of Jesus about the suffering and challenges of his own journey, as well as those of the disciples, are followed by a strengthening experience of transcendence.

And he was transformed in the praying so that the appearance of his face was different and his garment became gleaming white (Luke 9:29). Two were conversing with him: Moses and Elias. Moses is prototype of the tradition of the covenant, the law, and the exodus: Elias represents the tradition of the prophets. Jesus is the central focus in dialogue with the heroes of the traditions of the "Law and the Prophets." They appear in glory *(doxē)* and speak with him of his coming exodus which he is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and the others are weighted down with sleep, but when they wake thoroughly they see his glory and the glory of the two standing with him.

The imagery reminds us of the story of Moses and the mountain experience (Exod 19). Although there are many differences between the two texts, there are resemblances of going up the mountain, of the meeting with God, of the cloud, of voices. The approving voice from heaven was also heard at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:17; Luke 3:22). The experience of Jesus signals a new covenant, a new mountain experience. Jesus is not only peer with Moses and Elias as representatives of the earlier covenants, but he is central and continues the traditions represented by the others.

> A voice comes out of the cloud saying:
> "This is my chosen son:
> hear him" (Luke 9:35).

This is the new revelation. It is simple. It is a call to simplicity and response. As the voice ends, Jesus is found alone. The com-

ing of the new covenant has been confirmed by the authorities from of old, but now

> Jesus is alone:
> He is the son:
> "Hear him" (Luke 9:35-36).

The narrator concludes by saying that they kept silent in the sense of not revealing yet the things which they had seen.

We are disappointed that women are not described as part of the experience, but if we look at the part which Peter, James, and John play in the story, we perceive a different insight. Once again the three men, the three leaders of the apostles are brought as authorities, as expert witnesses. But their witness is paradoxical. They are asleep for a large part of the experience! When they do awake, they are on a different track from the experience of Jesus: they want to build three tents! Peter doesn't know what he is saying! (Luke 9:33). Precisely because of their lack of understanding, Peter and the others provide not only unprejudiced witness but also models of misunderstanding with which those who are hearing Luke's story can identify. These three men are in contrast to the women in the first resurrection narrative, especially the three, who find the empty tomb, hear what the messenger is saying, and proceed to tell the disciples.

A Boy Possessed by the Demon

Like Moses, Jesus comes down from the mountain and is met by the people (Luke 9:37). Luke then tells the story common to the synoptic tradition of a father whose son is oppressed by a demon. In Luke's account the son is an only son. The symptoms are those of epilepsy or another similar neurological disorder. A demon or spirit seizes him, suddenly cries out, throws him with foam, and bruises him. The language communicates the rawness of the experience, with which parents or friends of epileptics, and epileptics themselves can relate. The father has asked the disciples to expel the demon, but they were not able.

The situation is the context for a saying of Jesus that is also raw in an emotional sense:

"O unbelieving generation
that has been perverted!
How long shall I be with you
and endure you?
Bring here your son" (Luke 9:41).

This is not the Jesus of comfort and affirmation. This is the Jesus in the prophetic tradition of the oracles, of Ezechiel and the other prophets, who recognize and name the perversions of those who distort justice. Here Jesus names the oppression of this demon as a situation which is related to an unbelieving generation. The lack of faith is apparently a result of the perversion, the turning from God, the lack of that kind of wholeness and faith which can even expel demons and bring about healing and wholeness.

But even if we come to terms with that part of the saying, we are still surprised at the impatience of Jesus. His emotions seem to be at a raw edge as well. Nevertheless, Jesus says: "Bring your son here."

Women, parents, care givers can certainly relate to the emotions which Jesus is expressing. But, like Jesus, many are able to transcend or transform their feelings into healing. The impatience of Jesus, however, is with the lack of faith. That is the perversion. The generation has turned from a life of faith with all the healing power which that implies. This is what is so disturbing to Jesus. This is the perversion. It is also the injustice. Justice calls for faith, relationship with the God of the universe. Such faith is power which can be instrument of healing and triumph over oppression, even the oppression of demons.

Even while the boy is coming to Jesus, the demon is still fighting and throws the boy violently. We are surprised at the spirit being called "unclean." This is in the sense opposite to the saying: "Blessed are the clean of heart." It is also a covenantal or ritual uncleanness. Jesus calls to a straightness, an authenticity, a cleanness that is not foul or polluted.

Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit
and heals the boy
and restores him to his father
and all were astounded at the magnificence of God (Luke 9:42).

This is the context of Jesus' call for faith: enter into the magnificence of God.

The Betrayal to Come

"And while they were marveling at these things . . . ." (Luke 9:43). Luke uses this description of marveling more frequently than others. It supports her theme of the wonderful works which God is doing among her people. But the irony and paradox is not far away. While they are marveling, Jesus says to the disciples: "Lay these sayings in your ears . . . ." (Luke 9:44). The implied figure of speech is an interesting one. The Revised Standard translation is "Let these sayings sink down into your ears." The image is one of disciples savoring the important teachings of their master. There may even be a linkage to the image of the sowing of the seed. As seed is fertilized in the ear of the grain, so is the Word of God brought to fruit in the hearing of the faith.

But the next part of the saying contradicts the expectation:

> "Let these sayings
> be handed over into your ears:
> for the son of man
> shall be handed over into the hands of men" (Luke 9:44).

Among other figures there is a wonderful parallelism here. "These sayings" is parallel with "the son of man," the author of the sayings. The verb "sink down" is the image of "handing over." The sayings are handed over into the hearing, the ears of the disciples, but the son of man is handed over into the hands of men. The contrast is between the work of God and the work of men, the realm of faith and the realm of destruction. Even the word "to be betrayed" *(paradidosthai)* or "handed over" is a pun on the handing over of instruction.

No wonder the narrator comments that they did not know this word, this inner knowledge, and it was veiled from them lest they should perceive it. No wonder that they feared to ask him about this saying, this word (Luke 9:45).

As if to illustrate their lack of understanding there ensues a debate as to who might be the greatest. Jesus counters (Luke 9:47)

by taking a child *(paidion),* a learner, and placing the child beside himself. This provides the context for another saying or instruction:

> "Whoever receives this child in my name
> receives me
> and whoever receives me
> receives the one who sent me
> for the lesser one among all of you:
> This one is great" (Luke 9:48).

The child, the learner, is the answer to the debate of their hearts. The verb for "receive" is *dechetai,* which suggests a net of bonding, the relationship of a disciple and a master.

The next line begins: "And John answering . . . ." We don't know why the verb "answering" is used. Answering what? Responding to what? To Jesus' action and saying about the child? Either the verse is simply another topic, or the narrator is showing how John has missed the point, and makes his misunderstanding even more obvious by asking:

> "Faith-master,
> we saw someone
> in your name expelling demons,
> and we prevented him because
> he does not follow with us" (Luke 9:49).

At first hearing, his statement is absurd. Is it not always good to expel demons? Is it offensive if it is done in the name of Jesus? John has succumbed either to legalism, to a false sense of an exclusive bonding with Jesus, or to pride. As hearers, we are aware of his obscuring the obvious and are thereby cautioned not to yield to a similar deafness.

Jesus speaks clearly:

> "Do not prevent:
> who is not against you
> is for you" (Luke 9:50).

Jesus is not exclusive. Jesus is open to good, healing, and justice, from whatever quarter they come. Paul learns this lesson well, and repeats it in a number of ways.

It is sad that too often our official Church groups or other institutions are too protective of their powers, and allow good, healing, and justice to come only when they conform to the structurally approved ways. Women are often in the position of doing good, healing, and working for justice even when the approved structures do not allow them support or access to structured channels. They will find ways that are not bound by legalism or extraneous rationalizations. The hearer in the Gospel is called to the freedom of Jesus.

Going Up to Jerusalem

The next narrative is enigmatic. It begins a series of stories intertwined with sayings of Jesus. With his followers Jesus is going up to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), but allusions to the expected images of Jerusalem are overturned. Jesus is not the ordinary pilgrim. He is recognized as one having his face set to go to Jerusalem, but instead of conformity to the usual behavior of a pilgrim, he sets a new course, a new interpretation. His "going up" becomes a "being taken up" (*analēmpseōs,* assumption). Many of the words take on even more levels of meaning than usual in Luke.

This particular word *assumption,* "being taken up," is unique in its usage here. In a slightly different form, it has similarities with a verb in Acts 7:43, in which Stephen refers to the false gods, ancestor gods which the Israelites "bore up" in the desert. The section in Amos in which the word is used is a condemnation of false worship, worship separated from justice. "Let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24). Jesus is the new Moses leading the people through the desert. He is the new prophet crying out for justice as Amos did. He condemns hypocrisy and calls out for justice. He calls for universality and respect for each, no matter what the national, ethnic, or social background. The sayings, the images, and the narratives build to a climax of a discipleship that is radically reoriented in the prophetic tradition.

"He set his face to go to Jerusalem." This expression leads us back to Ezechiel. In chapter 20 Ezechiel says:

> "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying:
> 'Therefore prophesy, son of man,

> set thy face steadfastly toward Jerusalem,
> and look toward their holy places,
> and thou shalt prophesy against the land of Israel'" (LXX Ezek 21:1-2).

The language in Luke not only suggests commitment to go to Jerusalem but probably also alludes to the passing of death, since in 22:22 Luke uses another form of the verb "go" to indicate Jesus' speaking of his going into death. This going to death in Jerusalem, the "city of peace," is a contradiction, but it is the same contradiction found in the prophets who described Jerusalem as the destroyer of prophets. Jesus going to his death is an indictment against the land of Israel.

"And he sent messengers before his face" (Luke 9:52). The word "face" links three lines:

1) Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem;
2) he sends messengers before his face;
3) and the Samaritans do not receive him because his face is of one going to Jerusalem.

We are surprised in a way because otherwise in Luke the Samaritans are pictured in a positive light. In the parable in Luke 10, it is the good Samaritan who has compassion on the one who fell among thieves. When Jesus heals the lepers in chapter 17, it is the Samaritan who returns to give thanks. In Acts, the Word of God is preached to the people of Samaria.

The disciples as messengers rejected—James and John—ask if they shall tell fire to come down from heaven and destroy the Samaritans, but Jesus turns and rebukes them. In Ezechiel 20:47 (LXX) the word of the Lord threatens to kindle a fire that will devour all from the north to the south, but the prophet says, "Not so, O Lord." Jesus is such a prophet. The pericope concludes that Jesus and the disciples went on to another village.

Jesus is a realist. He knows that if he is in the prophetic tradition, he must name the injustices. Naming the injustices will bring him to the face of death, but the disciples do not understand. On the other hand, women stand at this same point whenever they realize the injustices in their situations. They know that

they walk on a dangerous path. They know that the violence of calling down fire will not correct the injustices, but only add more, but they also know that they are setting their faces towards contradiction and even death. The prophetic tradition is not foreign to them, as it was not foreign to Jesus.

Two other kinds of false disciples are described in the next verses. The first says, "I will follow you wherever you go" (Luke 9:57). The statement is the context for a saying of Jesus:

> "Foxes have holes,
> and birds of heaven have nests
> but the son of man has not a place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

The saying is not a mere set of nature metaphors. In a later context, Jesus calls Herod a fox (Luke 13:32). The hole is not just a lair, but a place of filth. Such prophets associated with the temple abominations described by Ezechiel have places of iniquity. In the parable of the sower, the birds of the air devoured the seed. They are the exploiters, the devourers. In contrast, Jesus has no place of permanence. He belongs to the naked earth. The son of man is on permanent pilgrimage, associated with no institutions. He has no lair. He has no place of exploitation.

How well can women, especially poor women, relate to a prophet who is not accepted by the establishment, who has no official connections, who has no place to lay his head.

The next kind of disciple also is not free. Jesus says: "Follow me" (Luke 9:59). But this false disciple asks that he first be allowed to go and bury his father. There is no indication that his father is dead. In fact, the father may be a long way from death, even in good health, but the false disciple is bound by structural ties that obscure his vision.

The saying of Jesus is enigmatic: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, to bury the dead of themselves" (Luke 9:60). The saying is not about caring for a dead body. It is about the false ceremonies and obligations that have little to do with real human relationships. It is the recognition that some make idols of their rituals and that such idol worshippers are not true disciples. On the contrary, Jesus says: "Go and announce the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

The last saying is in the context of describing a similar kind of false disciple. "I will follow you but first let me say farewell to those in my house" (Luke 9:61). Again, the problem is not one of saying good-bye. The problem is putting such obligations first, using them as excuse, looking behind rather than ahead. "No one putting his hand on a plow and looking at the things behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Anyone familiar with plowing knows how essential it is to keep the eyes on the view ahead, so as to make the rows straight. Such forward looking is also essential for the true disciple of Jesus. Excuses belong to the past and interfere with the building of the kingdom.

5

SENDING THE SEVENTY

Luke 10

The tract on discipleship continues. In the previous section the Lord had sent his messengers before his face into a village of the Samaritans to prepare a place for him. Now he officially constitutes a group of seventy and sends them two by two before his face into every city and place where he was about to come (Luke 10:1). The circle is widening from the smaller group to a larger one, and one that is formally constituted, at least in some way.

The number seventy is significant. Luke is the only Gospel writer who employs it, and it appears at the beginning and at the end of this group of sayings. Although some texts list the number as seventy-two, it seems that seventy is more likely the correct number. In the same chapter of Ezechiel referred to earlier, there is reference to the "seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel" (Ezek 8:11). They are associated with Temple worship, but have become corrupt and are involved with impurities and abominations. The numbers "seven" and "seventy" are important for many ancient peoples. Whether this is related to cosmic observances is not clear, although it is probable.

For the Hebrews, there are seventy peoples in the world (Gen 10) and seventy in the family of Jacob (Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5). The seventy elders of Numbers 11 are actually seventy-two, six for each tribe. This makes clear the rounding off of the number to indicate the fullness of representation and universality or completeness. So

in this text Luke pictures the Lord constituting the new people of God, the new group of elders, the new council.

But how different this group is from the one which ruled Israel in the time of Jesus. Far from being an oppressive, establishment body of authority, associated with judging, wealth, and the rule of the high priest, this body is a group of workers associated with the new work, the new life of announcing the good news of Jesus and the kingdom. The harvest is waiting; the workers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust workers into the harvest.

What will the work be like? The workers are sent out like lambs in the midst of wolves. They are not to carry purses or wallets, not even sandals which could be used as security in a loan. They are not "to greet anyone by the way" (Luke 10:4). What can this mean? The directive is in the context of avoiding the business of getting ahead, of materialism. They are not to be patting others on the back in order to get ahead. Then where are they to stay? When you enter a house say, "Peace be to this house" (Luke 10:5). If a child of peace is there, you will know it and be received. If so, remain eating and drinking, sharing in their life. The worker is worthy of this remuneration.

In agricultural areas at the time of harvest, this is very much the situation. Persons are hired or invited because they are needed to share in the harvest since the work is so great. It is assumed that they eat and drink at the table of the head of the house, partake of the work, but also partake of the good times and camaraderie. They are co-workers in a shared task, of reaping the riches of the earth which are needed to feed the community. They are respected and treated as family:

> "Wherever you are received,
> eat what is set before you
> and heal the sick who are therein
> and tell them: 'The kingdom of God is near'" (Luke 10:8-9).

On the contrary, if you go into a city and they do not receive you, shake even their dust off from your feet. Even so, know that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

The next three verses are "woes" or texts of execration. They can be read against the list of woes in Ezechiel 26–28, which ex-

coriate the "pagan" city of Tyre especially. Three of the cities mentioned are symbolic in Jewish folklore of depravity and subsequent destruction. Sodom—Matthew also includes the related city of Gemorrah—was probably in patriarchal times one of the oasis cities south of or along the Dead Sea. It became a symbol of depravity associated with assault, rape, and exploitation from the stories of the time of Lot. The location of Sodom and four or more other cities along the great geologic fault of the Jordan-Dead Sea rift would make possible, if not likely, a cataclysmic event such as earthquake and fire. Some recent archeological work seems to point in this direction. For whatever reason, Sodom became also a symbol of great destruction.

The other two cities of Tyre and Sidon, Phoenician centers of trade along the Mediterranean, also became symbolic of depravity because of the "pagan" and enforced cults of Melkart, the Baal of Tyre (and probably of his consort Asherah), introduced by the queen Jezebel. They became symbol also of great destruction through war as they were assaulted and captured after long sieges by various enemies.

The next pair of cities are two probably located on the north shore of the lake of Galilee, an area no doubt familiar to Jesus. Certainly the nearby city of Capernaum, about twenty-three miles from Nazareth, became the city of Jesus, scene of his early preaching, and center for the call to discipleship, and of many of the dramatic events described by the Gospel writers as part of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee.

The comparison is made that if the cities associated with depravity had experienced the mighty works which Chorazain and Bethsaida had witnessed, they would have repented long ago. In the judgement it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon! As for Capernaum, "Will you be lifted up to heaven?" (Luke 10:15) No! "You will be brought down to Hades." Luke refrains from saying, as Matthew does, that in the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for Capernaum.

These are very strong words. What is the import? The lessons in discipleship continue. The depravity and consequent destruction familiar as examples to the disciples are put in a new perspective. Such "pagan" activities are less morally reprehensible

than the rejection of Jesus as a bringer of reconciliation, of simplicity, and of service.

Jesus extends the simplicity of his message to the disciples:

> "The one who hears you hears me,
> and the one who rejects you rejects me,
> and the one who rejects me rejects the one
> who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

The collection of instructions in discipleship is now rounded off. The narrative resumes that the seventy returned with joy because even the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus. Jesus affirms that he has given them power over serpents, scorpions, and the enemy, but this is not what is important. They are to rejoice that their names are enrolled in heaven.

Again, what appears somewhat enigmatic is a refutation of cult, whether from within or without the Jewish tradition, and of all the aberrations, exploitations, and depravities associated with them. The call is to healing, to simplicity, to universality. These disciples' names are not enrolled in such cultic Temples but in the heavens associated with Jesus and with the one who sent him, the creator of the universe.

The narrative concludes with a beautiful prayer. Luke pictures Jesus as rejoicing in the spirit. (Joy and spirit are favorite themes of Luke.)

> "I praise you father,
> lord of heaven and of earth,
> because you hid these things
> from the 'wise and intelligent'
> and revealed them to infants."
> "Yes, father,
> for so it seemed good in your sight.
> "All things are handed over to me by my father
> and no one knows who is the son
> except the father
> and who is the father
> except the son and
> the one to whom the son
> shows him" (Luke 10:21-22).

Then he turns to the disciples and says privately:

"Blessed are the eyes seeing what you see,
for many prophets and kings
desired to see
the things you see
and to hear the things you hear,
and they did not hear them" (Luke 10:23-24.)

The instruction in discipleship is followed by a dialogue. In turn, the dialogue leads into the story of the Good Samaritan. The disciples have just heard a list of sayings which radicalize the interpretation of the law, placing it in the hands of those open to the new kingdom. They see and hear what prophets and kings did not see and hear.

Now a member of the lawyer class stands up to test this self-proclaimed interpreter of the law. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). In Mark, the question is: "Which commandment is the first of all?" In Matthew: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Luke's tradition makes explicit one of his dominant themes: "the life of the ages", "the life of the aeons," "eternal life." The lawyers, the Sadducees, did not believe in the resurrection, so the question is devious, but very appropriate for the disciples of Jesus. For them, the context of the question is loaded with irony. This audience recognizes that, indeed, it is Jesus who has brought them the new life of resurrection. It is the misinterpreters of the law, those who should understand, who paradoxically do not understand, do not see or hear, and who reject Jesus.

The Greek words provide fruitful meditation for the disciple. "Teacher" is *didaskale,* a teacher who leads to a way of life, who provides a way of living, a world view. The word for "do" is *poiēsas* which connotes the act of creating.

Jesus is pictured as teaching in the rabbinic style of returning the question to the questioner. "What is written in the law? How do you read?" The lawyer answers with the great commandment from Deuteronomy:

"You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,

and with all your soul,
and with all your strength,
and with all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Jesus affirms: "You have answered right.
Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

To live is to have the life of the ages, the eternal life. Jesus respects the competence of the lawyer; he has reaffirmed the beauty of the Deuteronomic law in its great simplicity, devoid of the excrescences of cult, hierarchy, classes, and oppression.

Jesus illustrates with one of the most beautiful parables from the tradition. The parable is unique to Luke. It is placed within the *inclusio* of the lawyer's question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and the imperative, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:36-37).

Tradition in Israel points out the ruins of an inn on the road halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho. It would be an appropriate stopping place for someone making the journey. The land is rugged, plagued by thieves and by dry, hot climate from which many have died, not only long ago but continuing through our own times. The person in Jesus' story who was traveling this route fell among thieves

AB "who stripped him,
and beat him,
and departed,
leaving him half-dead" (Luke 10:30).

We have here a description of a person who fell among robbers, but we also have a description of what happens often to a prophet, of what will later happen to Jesus. There is the element of the universality of the violated, the abandoned, the half-dead who are left to die.

As the story is unique to Luke, so is the language and style unique even within Luke. It has the elements of a great folk tale, developed through telling and retelling, or reflecting the genius of a unique teller of tales, a unique teller of parables, which Jesus certainly was. This story has become a classic of world literature. (Letters indicate similar structures).

	"And by coincidence
a	a certain priest
b	was going down
c	in that way,
d	and seeing him,
e	passed by opposite.
a'	"And likewise also a Levite
b'	coming upon the place
d'	and seeing
e'	passed by opposite.
a"	"And a certain Samaritan
b"	going along the way
c"	came upon him
d"	and seeing
E	was filled with compassion."

The structures are then reversed and illustrate the compassion:

E'	AB'	"And approaching
AB'		he bound up his wounds
AB'		pouring on oil and wine,
AB'		and placing him on his own beast
AB'		he brought him to an inn
AB'		and cared for him.
AB'		"And on the morrow
AB'		taking out two denarii
AB'		he gave to the innkeeper and said:
AB'		'Care for him,
AB'		and whatever you spend in addition
AB'		I on my return
AB'		will repay you'" (Luke 10:30-35).

The English words make a beautiful story, but the Greek phrases are filled with assonance and point to levels of meaning which tease the imagination.

The phrase "by a coincidence" is unique in Luke. Does it mean "by chance," as it is usually translated? Literally it means: "the two things happening together": *syg-kyrian.* Is the literalness of "co-incidence"—two incidents happening together—closer to the

meaning? Is there even a pun on *syg-kyrian?* Instead of our idea of chance, is there implied togetherness with the working out of the lord, the *kyrios,* present in all of history? For Jesus, for his culture, perhaps there was not even the possibility of a happening which we secularist westerners call "chance."

The word for "priest" is *hiereus,* a sacrificer, the one from whom is expected leadership, moral uprightness, compassion. The priest is going *down* that way. He is going from the center of holiness, Jerusalem, to one of the centers of secularism and of Herod's Hellenistic, materialistic, and Roman ways. He sees the man half-dead—that is made clear, but he passes by on the opposite side: *antiparēlthen.* The Levite too should exemplify the moral. He too comes to the place. He too sees, and he too passes by on the opposite side. The story is a criticism of the establishment, of hypocrisy, of false righteousness, a critique of the religious leadership of Israel.

In contrast, the Samaritan on the way comes upon him, sees him, and is filled with com-passion, a compassion that comes from deep within his humanness. This word is one used in another context to describe the compassion Jesus feels as he identifies with the suffering of another. The Samaritan is a Christ-figure, one rejected, not of the leadership class, but one who can identify with the human in need.

What does the Samaritan do? The description is lengthy, a large part of the parable. It is a description of what a disciple does. His compassion leads him to approach, to bring healing to the wounds. He pours on oil and wine. These were the cleansing, antiseptic, and healing elements of the time, but we may ask if they also imply aspects of the initiatory rituals of the early Christian communities. The Samaritan lifts him—no easy task perhaps, and places him on his own beast. The priest is the one who sacrifices animals: The Samaritan uses the animal to help. The Levite was the one trained in the law, theoretically the law of love: The Samaritan is the one who lives out the law of love.

The Samaritan brings him to an inn. An inn is a place where all are received, all cultures, classes. No one is excluded. The Samaritan cares for him himself. He stays overnight. Was this an interruption of his schedule? his plans? He gave two denarii, the

value of two days pay for an unskilled worker, to the innkeeper, a significant sum for someone unknown to the Samaritan. He promises, not only to return, but to pay whatever additional the innkeeper has spent.

The case has built dramatically and persuasively. What a bombshell, then, is the question: "Who of these three does it seem to you has become neighbor to the one falling among the robbers?"

The inquirer cannot say the word "Samaritan." He dodges a direct answer, and says ambiguously: "The one acting with compassion toward him." Jesus says: "Go and do likewise."

Martha and Mary

In another story unique to Luke, the instruction in discipleship continues. A woman, Martha, receives Jesus into her house. Martha is a householder. She expects to entertain her guest. She has a sister Mary who is sitting beside Jesus at his feet listening to what he is saying, his word, his instruction. Martha is whirling around, distracted about much serving. The word "serving" *(diakonian)* is typically used in Acts of ministry. And coming upon him she said, "Lord, doesn't it matter to you that my sister has left me alone to serve?" (Luke 10:40) What kind of service or ministry is it which involves a righteousness of judging another or telling another what to do? The irony comes through. Martha feels she is serving and her sister is not. Typically, Martha tells Jesus to tell Mary so that she can help! He answers, but not in the way that Martha expects.

> "Martha, Martha,
> you are anxious and disturbed
> about many things.
>
> "There is need for only a few things
> or even only one.
> Mary chose the good part
> which shall not be taken from her" (Luke 10:42).

The woman Mary is confirmed in her ministry of discipleship, of listening to Jesus, of contemplation. Jesus is friends with women. He invites them to listen and to learn.

PART FOUR:
INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISCIPLES

1

INSTRUCTION IN PRAYER

Luke 11

Luke continues the instruction in discipleship by describing Jesus at prayer (Luke 11:1) and outlining the way Jesus taught the disciples to pray. First, he shows Jesus praying in a certain place. The word for praying is *pros-euchomenon,* which suggests going into the presence of, attending to, paying court to, praising.

How did Jesus pray? His rabbinic style may well have been the vocalizing of words such as the familiar phrases of the psalms, the giving of himself to the presence of the one he understood as his father, the listening for direction, the praising of the beauty and works of his father, the request for assistance and healing for himself and for others. How long did he pray? The tradition is consistent in picturing Jesus as a person of prayer, of one in tune with his father, listening, asking.

In this particular case, one of the disciples observes him praying. We can imagine their wondering how he entered into such presence, how he had learned to praise. When this disciple notices that he has stopped praying, he says to him: "Lord, teach us to pray even as John taught his disciples to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Although Matthew has a parallel text, the thrust in Luke's account is an instruction which is extremely simple, which is not to be confused with the excessive rituals familiar in the Greek and Hebrew temple prayer traditions. The simplicity is striking:

"Father" . . . . Who are these simple folk to call God their father? Not "king of the universe," not "God of my fathers," not "Yahweh," "Adonai,"or "El Shaddai," not "Lord," but "father," adult child to adult parent, family, loved one. Luke does not add as Matthew does "who art in heaven." There is to be no confusion with the gods of the heavens.

"Hallowed be your name." May your name be whole, holy. What a simple name! Not the multiplication of names, not the exalted names familiar to the potentates of the time. But may the simple name of the father be acknowledged as holy.

"Let his kingdom, his homeland, come!" The homeland of such a father, a homeland of simplicity, a homeland of these people associated with him.

> "Our bread which belongs to tomorrow—
> give us each day and
> forgive us our transgressions
> for, indeed, for ourselves,
> we forgive everyone owing to us" (Luke 11:3).

The concepts are interrelated. The future is placed in the hands of the father. Jesus tells the disciples to ask for the bread for each day, not hoarding it up or worrying about the future. The receiving of the bread is simultaneous with the receiving of forgiveness, which in turn is related to the forgiveness of others.

"And lead us not into temptation." Again, Luke omits "But deliver us from evil (or the evil one)," as well as the liturgical ending "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever." "Temptation" *(peirasmon)* can mean a putting to the test, the experience of evil, or adversity. "Don't bring us into troubles or adversity" is the vernacular sense.

The prayer and the world view or attitude which it communicates is one of simple trust and simple relationship. It is the opposite of the multiplication of words and rituals. It is almost stark by comparison with many of the traditions prevalent at the time of Jesus. It is as though the disciples would say: "Is that all?"

Jesus illustrates with a homey dialogue which emphasizes the assertiveness of the prayer of asking and which leads into the list-

ing of the logia: "Ask and you shall receive, Seek and you shall find, Knock and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Jesus says:

"Who of you shall have a friend
and go to him at midnight
and say to him:
'Friend, lend me three loaves
since a friend of mine
has arrived from a journey
and has come to me
and I have not anything
to set before him.'

"And the one within
answering may say:
'Don't cause me troubles.
Now the door has been shut
and my children are with me in the bed.
I cannot rise up to give to you.'
I tell you
even if he will not rise up
and give him because he is his friend,
yet on account of his impudence,
rising he will give him
as many as he needs" (Luke 11:5-8).

The dialogue is unique to Luke. It includes key words distinctive enough to point in certain directions and to raise certain questions. The first is the word "friend," *philon,* a dear one, a congenial associate, one who is cherished. The second word is "bread," *artous,* loaves. A third is "journey," *hodou,* a way. A fourth is the verb *anastas,* rising up.

On one level we have a simple, rather humorous description of a fairly common experience of needing provisions and bothering a friend until one is supplied or answered. The associations of the particular words used may just be coincidence, or memory devices, but it is also conceivable that they point to a level of prayer in a liturgical resurrection community that suggests other levels of meaning.

The loaves in the Temple were the loaves or the bread of the

Presence, the Presence of God. The word weaves as a theme through the Gospel. In the temptation scene Jesus is asked to turn the stone into bread. Jesus replies with the line from Deuteronomy in the great charge of the covenant: "Man shall not live by bread alone" (but by every word that proceeds form the mouth of God) (Deut 8:3; Luke 4:4).

The next use is when Jesus replies to the Pharisees, "Have you not read how David and those who were with him entered the house of God and took and ate the loaves of the Presence?" (Luke 6:3-4.) In Luke 9 it is the story of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes.

The words start to take on Eucharistic overtones. After this little dialogue in chapter 11, the context moves to the banquet imagery of the end time. The ironies multiply: Jesus eats a banquet with the Pharisees who criticize him (Luke 14:1), but when someone comments: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," Jesus tells the story of the banquet for which those invited made excuses why they couldn't come (Luke 14:16ff.).

The banquet becomes explicit in Luke 22:9 when Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples: "This is my body given for you." Finally, in the Emmaus story, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and "their eyes are opened" (Luke 24:30-31).

Do we have a cryptic commentary referring to the intensity of prayer for the disciples of the early Christian community who, through their "impudence" can ask for "bread," for "three loaves," and who by their perseverance will persuade the friend, even though he is in the conjugal bed with his disciples *(paidia),* to rise up and give them as many as they need? Do we have a veiled reference to Jesus with the disciples who, having entered into the life of resurrection, nevertheless will respond to the impudence of prayer?

As indicated, the treatise on prayer continues with a list of sayings: "And I tell you":

> "Ask and it will be given to you
> Seek and you will find
> Knock and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

The structure and the assonance to a certain degree come through even in translation. The urgency of the action follows from the setting of urgency described in the previous anecdote. The asking is almost a demanding, perhaps even in the sense of a court context. What will be given is over and above the expectation, even in the temple sense of giving and receiving blessings. The seeking is a searching, a pursuit. The verb for "you will find" *(heurēsete)* has sounds which have similarities to the word for Eucharist (*eucharistōn,* Luke 17:16). Moreover, the connotation of "finding" is "discovering, comprehending, recognizing." "They knew him in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35).

We would expect that "knock" and "open" would be common words often linked together, but we are surprised to find the pair somewhat less common than we might expect. There are two other linkages in Luke: 12:36. When the lord comes from the wedding and knocks, be ready that you may immediately open; and 13:25: "When once the house-master is risen and he shuts the door, and you begin . . . to knock . . . saying lord, open to us. . . ."

On the other hand, the heavens opening, the opening of the eyes, the opening of the scriptures are fairly common concepts. The verb "open" also leads us back to Ezechiel. Especially interesting is Ezek 37:12-14:

> Thus says the lord God:
> "Behold I will open your graves,
> and raise you from your graves,
> O my people.
> and I will bring you home
> into the land of Israel.
>
> And you shall know
> that I am the lord
> when I open your graves,
> and raise you from your graves,
> o my people.
>
> And I will put my spirit within you
> and you shall live
> and I will place you in your own land;

Then you shall know
that I the lord have spoken
and I have done it," says the lord.

Like a liturgical refrain, the next verse reiterates:

"Everyone asking receives,
the one seeking finds,
and to the one knocking it will be opened" (Luke 11:10).

Verses 11-13 offer a negative proof: If a son will ask for a fish, which father among you will hand him a serpent? Or if he will ask for an egg, will hand him a scorpion? Some of the words are intriguing. "Fish" is *ichthun/ichthuos,* an early Christian cryptogram for "Jesus Christ Son of God Savior" from the first letter of each word in Greek. Also in some mid-eastern cultures, the image of the fish represented a god associated with wisdom. If one asks for Jesus, will a father give the one asking a serpent, a serpentine person? If one asks for an egg, the sign of fertility, new life, and resurrection will a father give a scorpion? If the human being polluted knows how to give good gifts to children, "how much more the father of heaven will give the spirit of holiness to the ones asking" (Luke 11:13). We finally come to the climactic development in the treatise on prayer:

One asks for the Christ of the resurrection:
the father gives the spirit of holiness.

Luke has unfolded this instruction which is for disciples but nevertheless "revealed to infants" (Luke 10:21). We can picture a community learning to be disciples, for which Jesus is pictured as giving primacy to the great commandment of love as the way to inherit the life of the ages (Luke 10:25). Jesus affirms the contemplative attitude of Mary, the woman sitting at his feet. He teaches the prayer of simplicity in the prayer to the father (Luke 11:2). He illustrates with an anecdote about the imposing friend. He repeats and elaborates: "Ask and you shall receive." Cryptically he indicates that what is being asked for is the resurrected Christ. And the father gives the breath of holiness, his own spirit, the spirit of holiness and wisdom (Luke 11:13).

2

DEMONS, EVIL, AND HYPOCRISY

The scene shifts to begin an extended discourse on demons and on evil, darkness, and division. In the structure we notice the repetition of words such as demon and of sounds such as *l* and *n*, which may have been helps in remembering the story and instruction. The unusual reference to Beelzebul raises interesting questions. It appears in this context in Mark and Matthew, as well as here in Luke. Mark has the scribes saying: "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out demons" (Mark 3:22).

The only other biblical appearance of the name is in 2 Kings 1 in the context of an Elias story in which the king of Israel sends messengers to this baal of an alien city or high place to ask whether his sickness is one from which he will recover. An angel tells Elias to rise and go to meet the messengers and ask them if they have to go to a foreign god because there is no god in Israel. The question is rhetorical and also an ironic indictment of the king and of those who do not recognize God in Israel. In the next chapter, Elias, a prefigure of the Messiah, after his mantle of authority is transferred to Elisha, is taken up into heaven from which he is to return. More recently we have learned that in the Ugarit mythology, Baalzebul is the prince of demons or gods, and probably is associated with a cult of fertility, and of death/resurrection in the context of fertility rites.

We are also pushed to ask the place of such an instruction in the early Christian communities. If the previous verses are an instruction in prayer, is this section related to exorcisms and an instruction on the contradictions, darkness, and evils which the followers of Jesus, as well as the early Christians experienced?

At any rate, Luke pictures Jesus:

> And he was expelling a demon
> and it was dumb.
> And it came to pass
> as the demon was going out
> the dumb spoke
> and the crowds marveled (Luke 11:14).

As we noted earlier, in the world view of the time, illnesses and erratic behavior were associated with possession by an oppressive demon. If the person could not speak, the negative demon was expelled in order to free the person to healthful use of human abilities. The word for dumb *kōphon* refers to dullness, for example, of a sword or weapon which does not cut, which is dull. By extension it referred to persons who could not hear and/or speak. Jesus is freeing the person to speak.

But some say he is expelling the demons by the power of Beelzebul the prince of the demons. And others tempt him by seeking a sign from heaven to show the source of his power. The demon, the Satan is divisive. The sign is the unifier. He understands their devious intentions. He says:

> "Every kingdom
> divided against itself
> is made desolate.
> A house
> against a house
> falls" (Luke 11:17).

Jesus adds to the irony: "If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?—because you say that by Beelzebul I cast out demons" (Luke 11:18). The rabbinic argument builds: "If I expel demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons expel them? therefore they will be your judges. But if I by the finger of God

expel the demons, then the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:19-20).

The next six verses are a folk-type illustration of the evils of divisiveness:

> "When a strong man well armed
> guards his own palace
> his goods are in peace
> But when one stronger than he
> comes and overcomes him,
> he takes the armor
> on which the other had relied
> and distributes the armor."
>
> "The one who is not with me is against me
> and the one not gathering with me scatters."
>
> "When the unclean spirit goes out from a man
> he goes through dry places seeking rest,
> and not finding it says,
> I will return to my house from whence I came
> and coming he finds it swept and furnished.
> Then he goes and takes seven other spirits
> more wicked than himself,
> and entering he dwells there
> and the last things of that man
> are worse than the first" (Luke 11:21-26).

What are we to make of these images? We would prefer perhaps not to think of evil spirits or of wickedness. But the language acknowledges a reality that is difficult to ignore when we think of the holocaust of Hitler's Germany, of the genocides of many peoples during the twentieth century, of wars and destruction, of racism and sexism, of exploitations of various kinds. The language available in Jesus' time was the language of spirits of evil, of forces which defy our logic, which embody evil out of control and which are destructive of persons, systems, and societies. The reference to a cleaned house is particularly poignant in describing the continuing struggle with evil. We strive and strive and perhaps make some headway. But evil and destruction are part of the present human condition. They point to a brokenness of enormous proportions

that often seems out of control and which destroys persons and societies, as well as the other resources of the world.

Women, the oppressed, workers for peace and justice recognize and name such spirits and powers of evil. They recognize demonic dimensions in their experience of injustice. They recognize their own powerlessness, but at the same time they trust that their solidarity with others who are oppressed and their seeking for justice will bear fruit in the future.

As if in confirmation that indeed a woman understands the oppressions of evil forces, the author interjects a refrain similar to the joyful cry of Elizabeth and the proclamation of Anna in the Temple. A woman from the crowd lifts up her voice (Luke 11:27). This is an expression similar to what Luke uses in Acts 2:14 in the Pentecost story, when Peter, having been filled with the great rush of wind, the breath of the spirit, lifts up his voice and speaks to the crowd. Servants and handmaids will prophesy.

What the woman says is a *makaria,* a statement of blessing like the beatitudes:

> "Blessed is the womb that bore you
> and the breasts that you sucked" (Luke 11:27).

At an obvious level, this is an acknowledgment of the beautiful and essential place which the mother played in bringing forth such a prophet as Jesus. We are taken back to the beautiful Elizabeth-Mary story when Elizabeth ("house of God") proclaims:

> "Blessed *(eulogēmenē)* are you among women
> and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42).

We are also reminded of the woman out of whom seven demons went forth. Is this the same woman? Is it another woman who can identify with the oppression of demons and who is moved to proclaim how different is this Jesus who sees their oppressions, and who brings them hope and freedom? It is interesting that demons or unclean spirits are associated in the Gospels much more with men than with women.

Jesus' response and the following sayings lead us to a new insight. The response of Jesus is:

"Rather blessed *(makarioi)* are the ones
hearing and keeping the Word of God" (Luke 11:28).

We have moved from a physical or family relationship of blessedness to a family relationship of those who are hearing the Word of God and who are keeping it. In contrast to the Jewish tradition of neighbor and family being those related by blood ties, relationship of community is now defined as those hearing and keeping the Word of God. This may well include those of blood relationship, but that is no longer primary or even essential. A radical change in world view has taken place.

The commentary on evil is taken up again with references to Jonas, the Ninevites, and the queen of the south. The crowds are pressing on Jesus again. Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not mention Pharisees or scribes as seeking a sign, but speaks very directly:

"This generation is an evil, a polluted, generation:
it seeks a sign *(sēmeion zētei).*
And a sign will not be given
except the sign of Jonas" *(sēmeion Iōna)* (Luke 11:29).

The midrashic text provides a rich insight to the community who articulated this tradition. They were familiar with the ritual action of seeking a sign, both in the Greek world with which Luke was especially familiar, but also in the Egyptian temple tradition alluded to earlier. To seek a sign was to ask an oracle, to submit to a diviner. The world which Jesus has opened up is not a world of seeking oracles and diviners. It is the prophetic world of a call to justice, a world of following the spirit of God, even without understanding it. It is a call to universality in which even the Ninevites convert and repent.

"For Jonas became a sign to the Ninevites,
so also will the son of the earth *(anthrōpou)*
be to this generation" (Luke 11:30).

The queen of the south is Luke's phrase for the queen of Sheba or the queen of Saba described in 1 Kings 10 and in 2 Chronicles 9, whose story was a common part of the Jewish tradition. Why

does Luke substitute "south" for "Saba?" Probably because the name would be misleading for a Greek speaking audience. In Greek Sabos was a Phrygian deity afterwards taken as a name for Bacchus. The reference in Kings and Chronicles refers to one or a succession of queens of the area we now call Yemen who controlled trade routes and thereby became rich and known for wisdom. Nevertheless, such a queen came to Solomon to hear his wisdom.

> "The queen of the south will be raised
> in the judgement
> with the people of this generation
> and will condemn them
> because she came
> from the extremities of the earth
> to hear the wisdom of Solomon,
> and behold a greater than Solomon here" (Luke 11:31).

Likewise,

> "The people of Nineveh will rise up in the judgement
> with this generation
> and will condemn it
> because they repented
> at the proclamation of Jonas
> and behold a greater than Jonas here" (Luke 11:32).

The words in these sayings are loaded with what would have been technical words for the discipleship community. For example, "will be raised"—*egerthēsetai;* "will rise up"—*anastēsontai;* "repented"—*metenoēsan;* "proclamation"—*kērygma.* Luke has omitted Matthew's reference to Jonas being three days in the belly of the whale as a sign of Jesus being three days in the heart of the earth, but has nevertheless couched the sayings in resurrection and conversion terminology. The strength of argument for Luke is that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, but a greater than Jonas is here in the preaching of Jesus and in the repentance and change of heart that is taking place.

The *Midrash* on exorcism in the community, followed by a *Midrash* on conversion, now moves into a collection of sayings on

witness, on the light which will shine forth. At one level they are simple common place observations pointing to a clear metaphorical insight. They have the homeyness of folk maxims easily associated with the sayings of Jesus preserved in Q, the source common to Matthew and Luke. The variations in manuscript sources of Luke's particular applications point to input from other traditions as well. But the images themselves lead us to cultural and religious backgrounds which amplify possible levels of meaning and insight.

The previous sayings referred to Jonas, to the people and the city of the Ninevites, to the queen of the south and the wisdom of Solomon. Although it is not explicit, the sayings about light raise questions of temple and festival backgrounds with which the audience would have been familiar. For example, in the Egyptian traditions described by Herodotus, a Greek writer whom Luke may have studied, there were festivals of light, of which an outstanding one was dedicated to the Egyptian Minerva at Sais. The high walls and ruins remained until modern times. For the festival, called the Festival of Burning Lamps, participants were required to light a number of small vases filled with salt and oil, with a floating wick, which would burn all night around the home. But those who could not attend, which would have included in Luke's time many in Grecian lands, were also required to honor this goddess of wisdom by properly lighting the lamps.

A similar ceremony and festival in the Jewish tradition is the background for the description in John's Gospel of Jesus at the Jerusalem Temple for the festival of lights. John describes Jesus as proclaiming, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:15). Likewise, the Temple and compound at Sais in Egypt and at Grecian equivalents such as Ephesus would have provided an experience of a huge number of torches and lamps lighting up the darkness, providing no doubt for some a mystical experience of the triumph of light over darkness.

At Sais was a sacred lake on which was represented the allegorical history of Osiris (Wilkinson, 1.298):

> The peculiar character of Osiris, his coming upon earth for the benefit of mankind, with the titles of "manifester of good and

> truth," his being put to death by the malice of the evil one; his burial and resurrection, and his becoming the judge of the dead . . . was the great mystery; and this myth and his worship were of the earliest times, and universal in Egypt (Wilkinson, 1.331).

No one who lights a lamp places it under a bushel, but upon a lampstand so that others may see. And what is the lampstand? Not a thing associated with a local deity, but the Christian herself. The light of the body is the eye. If it is single, all of the body is bright, not dark *(skoteinon)*. Watch *(skopei)* so that the light will not be darkness *(skotos)*. If your whole body is bright all will be bright as when the lamp with its shining enlightens you (Luke 11:34-36). The word for shining is *astrapē,* usually signifying lightning within a theophany or experience of deity. (Refer also to Luke 17:24). The Temple and the festival, the lamps and the light are the Christian community.

Words Against Hypocrisy

The conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees reaches a climax in the context of a meal in which Jesus sharply criticizes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Although the context of a meal seems strange given the diatribe with which Jesus attacks the Pharisees, some words seem to point to a Lukan community Eucharistic meal.

The Pharisee invites Jesus to dine (Luke 11:37-38). The denotation of *aristēsē* suggests even breakfast. Was breakfast a normal meal time for the Christians who gathered at night to watch for the time of resurrection, the rising of the sun? There is an "entering" and a "reclining." The Pharisee is amazed that Jesus does not wash *(ebaptisthē)* before the community meal. The reader sees a relationship between washing and eating, between baptism and the community meal. But the irony is strong. The Pharisee who most carefully observes the ablutions, who should be the most "clean," is the one who washes only the outside of the cup (Luke 11:39). To wash only the outside is absurd—a joke really from the author.

The plays on words abound. The Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup *(potēriou),* but their insides are full of wickedness *(ponērias)*. "You are stupid—not understanding true religion" (on

which the Pharisees most prided themselves!) "Doesn't the one who makes the outside also make the inside?" (Luke 11:40). On the other hand, Jesus says, if you give of yourself from within, then everything is clean to you (Luke 11:41).

Next comes a series of woes: "Woe to you Pharisees. . . ." "Woe to you Pharisees. . . ." "Woe to you because. . . ." followed by a series of woes addressed to the Sadducees. "Woe to you lawyers. . . ." "Woe to you because. . . ." "Woe to you lawyers because. . . ." What are the actions which are excoriated or cursed? (Luke 11:42-52):

> "—tithing garden herbs or weeds and ignoring just judgement and the love of God
> —loving the presider's seat in the synagogues and expected bows in the marketplace
> —acting as unseen graves which followers walk over without knowing it
> —burdening people with burdens too difficult to carry while not lifting a finger to help
> —building the tombs of the prophets and thereby approving the work of those who killed them
> —taking the key of knowledge, but neither entering into that knowledge nor allowing others to enter" (Luke 11:42-52).

The verse 11:49 is a surprising insertion for several reasons—reference to the wisdom *(sophia)* of God, the linkage of prophets and apostles whom they will kill and persecute, and blood as a just requirement from this generation of all the blood shed from A to Z, from Abel to Zacharias. This prophet is a special link, for his blood was shed between the altar and the house. Altar stands for the tradition of sacrifice, and house for the institution of Temple. Such irony—that those who pride themselves on authority related to institutions themselves spill the blood that violates the institutions and thereby make clear their sinfulness and contamination.

No wonder that the lists of these sayings which have now built to such a climax are rounded off with the narrative comment that the scribes and Pharisees went forth from him terribly angry and drawing him out on many topics, indeed lying in wait to catch him saying something for which they could condemn him.

What can a woman make of this? It is the gift of some women who grow in wisdom (*sophia,* the feminine personification of God) to recognize and be repulsed by hypocrisy, by oppressions carried out in the name of justice, by the cleaning of the outside of the cup while ignoring the filth of the inside, the part that counts. It is often women who pierce through appearances to the inner reality, who know that justice and love of God are realities that count.

In the time of Luke and now, it is not typically women who love the presider's seat (or even who are allowed to sit in it!) or who seek obeisance from others. If women are walking over graves, they know it. In fact, in Luke's time it was the women who were in charge of activities relating not only to birth but also to death. It was they who prepared the body, they who visited the tombs, they who prepared the special foods associated, for example, with the rites of Demeter of death and resurrection, of decay and the seeds of new life. Women are not typically the ones who lay burdens on others, but they lift the burdens and take them on themselves as ways to liberate and love. Women know about the shedding of blood, the killing of prophets and apostles. Indeed, it was women who stood beneath the cross. It was women who cleansed Jesus' body of blood. It was women who wrapped his body and carried it to his tomb. It was women who were there when the seed of his body had died and been transformed into new life.

3

INSTRUCTION ON MATERIAL THINGS

Luke 12

Luke orients the continuing instruction in the context of a large group—thousands—so large as to tread on one another (Luke 12:1). Probably Luke had seen such assemblages at the feasts many times in his life. They took place seasonally in the walk along the Sacred Way pilgrimage from Athens to Eleusis for the celebration of the Eleusian mysteries for the initiated. Similar large gatherings took place regularly in the processions from the agora in Athens to the Parthenon or at the other great temple sites around the Mediterranean. But the traditional saying of Jesus is to the disciples: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," which Luke names as hypocrisy as a linkage with the preceding section.

The sayings are a call to openness for those learning to be disciples:

> "There is nothing covered
> which will not be uncovered,
> nothing hidden which shall not be known.
> Whatever you said in the darkness
> will be heard in the light
> and what you spoke in the ear in private rooms
> will be proclaimed on the roofs" (Luke 12:2-3).

The next group of sayings instructs on the material life of the body:

> "Don't be afraid of those killing the body
> but have nothing more that they can do.
> But fear the one who after the killing
> has power to cast into Gehenna" (Luke 12:4-5).

This is the only place where Luke refers to Gehenna. The saying is softened and countered by the homey

> "Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies
> and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Luke 12:6).

Matthew says "*one* penny." We see here then Luke's predilection for the number two, or perhaps inflation or geographic difference!

What is Gehenna? The word has an interesting history. It is an abbreviation of "the valley of the son of Hinnom," evidently an ancient dividing line or boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The deep and narrow ravine became notorious, however, because it was the site of Tophet, a cultic shrine where infant sacrifice was offered to the fire gods. Solomon built a shrine there for his foreign wives to worship their gods. Ahaz burned his own son or children here in sacrifice. As part of his reform Josiah made it ceremonially unclean by spreading over it human bones and other corruptions.

From Josiah's time it became the cesspool for the city, a place of constant fires burning sewage, animal and other refuse, a place of terrible smells. No wonder it assumed metaphorically the meaning of eternal fires. The imagery connotes a place of punishment and horrors known from personal or vicarious experience.

The Jews typically buried bodies as a way of respect, of preserving remains for a resurrection in the context of pharisaic thought, and as a way to honor the life source, or soul in later terminology. A body burning in the fires of Gehenna allowed no respect, no peace, no possibility of resurrection. On the other hand, one who has been killed for faithfulness to God can hope for honorable burial and resurrection.

The imagery continues in the personal mode. The very hairs of

our heads are counted out! Do not fear! You are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone who voices commitment to Jesus before others, Jesus will praise before the messengers of God. On the other hand, the one who denies Jesus before others will be denied before the messengers of God.

The next verse (Luke 12:10) seems enigmatic, especially following the previous two sentences. As Luke has rearranged these sayings they lead to the freedom of the movement of the Holy Spirit, so that if one speaks against the child of the earth, it will be forgiven, but one blaspheming against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. So powerful is this Spirit, that one should not even worry about the witnessing. Even if you are dragged into the synagogues or before rulers and authorities, don't even be anxious what you will answer or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in the same hour what things it is necessary to say.

As one should not worry about those who can kill the body or about what one will say when dragged before the magistrates, so one should not worry about possessions. The problem is posed: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus denies that he is a judge but cautions the group to guard against covetousness. Possessions don't make the life of a person.

Luke then has Jesus tell the parable of the rich fool. The land of the rich man brought forth abundantly, so the owner built larger barns to hold the crops. Then he said, "I will gather all the wheat and my goods, and I will say to my soul, 'You have goods for many years. Eat, drink, and be glad.'" But God said to him, "Foolish person, this night they demand your soul from you. The things you have provided—whose will they be?" (Luke 12:20). So is the one who gathers treasures to the self, and is not rich toward God.

The instruction moves to the basics of food and clothing:

> "Don't worry about your life—what you shall eat,
> nor about the body—what you will put on.
> The life is more than the food
> and the body more than the clothing" (Luke 12:22-23).

The instruction then uses beautiful images, each building on the preceding. Consider the ravens *(Katanoēsate tous korakas)*. In

most texts Luke has preferred this word *korakas.* Is it for alliteration? As an aside, we may ask: is he punning on the word *korasion*, the diminutive of *korē,* meaning maiden, damsel, daughter, or even newly married wife? *Korasion* is the word for the young woman raised from the dead. *Korē* is also the name under which Proserpine the *daughter* of Demeter was worshipped in Attica. The Proserpine myth was a prime story and ritual for the death-resurrection motif among the Greeks. The ravens neither sow nor reap, nor have storehouses, but God feeds them. By how much do you differ from the birds? (Luke 12:24).

But it is not just the clothing. Who can worry enough to add a cubit to your height? A cubit was more than a foot, and perhaps almost twenty inches! There is a play of humor running through these lines which we usually miss. If you can't do anything about these basics, why worry about the rest? (Luke 12:25-26).

A second consideration: Consider the lilies *(Katanoēsate ta krina).* Luke has carried over a parallelism of style, but the repetition of sounds would also make remembrance easier:

> "Consider the ravens which neither sow nor reap. . . .
> "Consider the lilies how they neither spin nor weave
> but Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed
> as one of these" (Luke 12:24, 27).

And if the grain *(ch(k)orton)* as grass in the field today is tomorrow thrown into an oven and becomes bread, God so clothes it, how much rather you, little-faiths! (Luke 12:28) We have a sense of a community alluding on another level to the clothing in Christ represented in the baptismal garment and the miracle of bread as symbol of transforming those in community.

So do not seek what you are going to eat or what you will drink, and don't be "raised aloft" or unsettled, for all the nations of the world seek these things. But your father knows that you need them. Rather seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added. Instead of "being unsettled," the little flock is admonished not to fear because the father is well pleased to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:29-32).

How does one seek this kingdom? Not only should one not worry, but even more, Jesus directs the disciples:

"Sell your possessions and give alms.
Make for yourself purses which do not grow old,
a treasure unfailing in the heavens
where neither thief nor moth breaks through
for where your treasure is there will your heart be"
(Luke 12:33-34).

The images then move to that of persons waiting for the master. The disciples should be like servants waiting for their lord who returns from the wedding and they immediately open to him. How paradoxical: *Makarioi hoi douloi.* Happy are those slaves whom the lord will find watching: He will gird himself and serve them! Even more so if he comes at the second or third watch in the early morning hours. Be ready for you do not know when the son of man, the child of the earth, is coming (Luke 12:40).

Verse 41 is a surprising insertion in Luke. Luke has Peter ask whether Jesus speaks the parable to him and the others or to all. In rabbinic style Jesus answers with a question and an illustration. The question is two edged. The reader assumes perhaps that Peter is in some way the "faithful and wise steward," appointed over the household attendants to give the portion of food in the appropriate time. Even another *makarios* seems at first reading to apply to Peter: Blessed is the servant the lord finds watching (Luke 12:41-43). He will be appointed over all.

But the next lines contradict our assumptions. If the servant-slave *(doulos)*—decides that the lord is delayed and starts to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and to drink and to become drunk, the lord of that servant will come on an unexpected day and hour, and will cut him asunder and will place his portion with the unbelievers. But the slave who knows the will of the lord but has not prepared accordingly will be beaten with many stripes. The one knowing less will be beaten with few stripes. Luke alone adds the comment: To whom much is given much will be demanded (Luke 12:45-48).

This diatribe on punishment seems uncharacteristic of the compassionate Christ, but we are reminded of Jesus driving the sellers out of the Temple. Is this a society which takes such beatings

for granted? Had Jesus been beaten during his life as he was beaten during his trials? (Luke 22:63-65). In the garden he asks if they have come out with swords and clubs. He tells Peter to put up his sword (John 18:11). Evidently the culture is one in which beating is an expected result when someone is unfaithful in his duties. How many women today can relate to such beatings, not usually for infidelity, but for dissatisfaction or anger.

Women especially but all disciples can relate to the strong words which follow:

> "I came to cast fire on the earth,
> but perhaps it is already kindled.
> I have a baptism (a death) to be baptized with
> and I am under siege until it be accomplished.
> Do you think I came to give peace in the earth?
> No, I tell you but rather division:
> There will be five in one house divided,
> Father against son and son against father,
> mother against daughter
> and daughter against mother,
> mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and
> daughter-in-law against mother-in-law" (Luke 12:49-53).

This Jesus whom Luke describes is a realist. Division unfortunately is the stuff of much of human life. We prefer perhaps not to think about it, but there are few families, few communities untouched by it. Resolution is often not easily accomplished. Do we have an insight here into the world that Jesus knew? Yes. Do we have an insight into the world of disciples which Luke describes? Yes. And at the same time, we have a glimpse of the pain and the mystery which Jesus knew and which Luke's community knew.

The next four verses appeal to weather signs as metaphor of what is to come. If one sees a cloud coming from the west, from the Mediterranean, one expects a shower. If the southwind blows from the Arabian desert, one expects heat. Hypocrites! You know how to judge the face of the earth and the heaven, but don't you know how to judge this time? Why can't you even judge for yourself what is right? When you go with your adversary to the ruler, try very hard to get rid of him lest he drag you to the judge and

the judge delivers you to the officer and the officer throws you into prison. You won't come out until the last penny is paid (Luke 12:54-59).

The rhetoric is strong. It is a rhetoric that bites into the experience of women and men today, from South Africa to El Salvador, to the streets and the homes of our neighborhoods. Jesus and the community of Luke know the reality of the experience of divisiveness.

4

PARABLES FOR THE COMMUNITY

Luke 13

Chapter 13 weaves together a series of narratives and parables which continue to provide instruction for the disciples. First is the call to repentance. Luke alone refers to these Galileans (Luke 13:1), other people from Galilee, the home of Jesus and most of the disciples. According to the story, as they were sacrificing Pilate killed them and thereby mixed their blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing. Were these Galileans sinners more than other Galileans that they suffered such horrors? No, but unless you repent, you will also perish. Jesus gives another example. In construction at the site of the pool of Siloam, a tower fell and killed eighteen persons. Were they debtors more than all the others living in Jerusalem? The words are repeated: No, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3). Sin and death are not related by cause-effect relationships, but death and destruction are the stuff of everyday occurrences in the first-century world. One is called to repent, make a change of life, and one is thereby opened to the life of the ages, life in the presence of God. This is the call to discipleship.

The storyteller then narrates the parable of the fig tree. This is the tree which in Mark and in Matthew is cursed by Jesus for not bearing fruit. Luke offers more flexibility. The owner of the vine-

yard seeks fruit and finds none. He tells the vinedresser: "For three years I have come seeking fruit and have found none. Why does it spoil the ground?" The vinedresser responds: "Lord, leave it this year. I will dig around it and fertilize it. It may bear fruit in the future. If not, you will cut it down" (Luke 13:6-9).

In contrast to the apparent lack of faith in the preceding images, Luke juxtaposes one of his stories of a woman despised, rejected, with a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, so that she is bent double and unable to stand erect. The number eighteen connects us with the story of eighteen who were killed when the tower fell on them (Luke 13:4)—perhaps a coincidence, perhaps a memory device. We are also reminded of the man at the pool for thirty-eight years (John 5:5) who was healed by Jesus.

Jesus calls her and says: "Woman, you have been loosed from your infirmity." He puts his hands on her. At once she is straightened and glorifies God (Luke 13:13). But the ruler of the synagogue is angry that Jesus heals on the Sabbath and quotes the law against work on the day of rest. Jesus calls them hypocrites because each one leads the animal to water on the Sabbath. "Should not this woman, daughter of Abraham, daughter of the father of faith, bound by the Satan eighteen years be loosened from her bond on the Sabbath?" Those opposing him are put to shame and the crowd rejoices in all these glorious things happening through him (Luke 13:14-17).

Next Jesus makes two comparisons of what the kingdom of God is like (Luke 13:18-21). "Kingdom" is not a favorite word for many people today. We may think of it as more oppressive and authoritarian than democracy, but it is helpful to realize that it was the dominant concept of government known at the time, and, in fact, that it was closer to the people than the imperial government of Rome which had conquered the known world and which elevated its emperor to the status of god. So the word "kingdom" represents the known form of government, of organized society, of the larger community which unites tribes or other contending groups. At its best it pointed to the eras of David and Solomon, although even there the prophets had resisted the concept of kingship. At its worst it named the self-serving kingships of later Judah and of Herod the fox, as Jesus called him.

Jesus knows no other form of government for a larger area. He apparently did not know of democracy for a larger group, although his experience of community includes qualities of delegation, respect, shared life, and peer respect. So "kingdom of God" is the generic term for a state of order that is, in fact, a world order transcending political kingdoms. The kingdom of God is not the kingdom of Herod. In fact, the kingdom of God is contradiction of such a kingdom.

"Kingdom" is a dominant word in the Gospels, especially in Matthew and Luke, although Matthew prefers "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God." It is so dominant that we may easily assume that we are hearing cadences of Jesus's preaching about the kingdom. Such preaching is a rallying cry to a new way of existence, a new way of relating, a new order of society.

What is the kingdom like? Luke begins in chapter one: Of this kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:33). Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). Jesus refers to the good news of the kingdom (Luke 8:1), the mysteries of the kingdom (Luke 8:10). He sends the disciples to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2). The kingdom is near (Luke 10:9).

So, after teaching in the synagogue and healing there on the Sabbath the woman bound for eighteen years, and being criticized by the ruler of the synagogue, but affirmed by the rejoicing people, Jesus asks what the kingdom of God is like (Luke 13:18). It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man threw into his garden and which became a tree or like leaven which a woman hid in three measures of flour till the whole was leavened (Luke 13:19-21). The kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21). The kingdom must be received as a child (Luke 18:17). As his father appointed to him a kingdom, Jesus appoints to his disciples a kingdom so they may eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). The kingdom, in other words, is not a masculine concept. It transcends gender or age or class structure. It is like a leaven which a woman hid in flour till the whole was leavened. This is imagery a woman can relate to. This is a kingdom she knows from daily experience. This is a kingdom of her everyday world.

Jesus, however, does not come as a king, except as one riding on a donkey, a contradiction of kingship. Especially in the parables a

word often used in place of "king" is "householder," which points to qualities different from those we associate with "king." The householder is the one responsible for the house, for the community which makes up the house. The householder protects, but primarily is responsible for storing and providing the bread. This is the etymology, interestingly enough, of the English word "lord," the one who provides the bread, the basis of life and of community.

Luke links this narrative with the next by saying that Jesus went through the cities and villages teaching and journey-making to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22). What does he teach? Can only a few be saved?

The struggle—the *agōn*—is to enter through the narrow door, the gate for pedestrians rather than the gate for wagons. One comes walking, not riding. Many will push to enter but will not be able (Luke 13:24). When the householder is "risen" and has shut the door, you will knock, begging to be admitted, but the householder will say, "I don't know where you are coming from." Then you will say, "We ate and drank before you, and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I don't know where you come from. Stand away from me, all you workers of injustice!" (Luke 13:27). There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you are thrust outside. Not only that, but they will come from east and west and north and south, and will recline in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are last ones who will be first, and there are first ones who will be last (Luke 13:30).

The Pharisees come and tell Jesus to depart for Herod wants to kill him. But Jesus tells them to report to Herod that Jesus expels demons and cures today and tomorrow and on the *third day* completes his work. Nevertheless, it is necessary to journey today and tomorrow for it is not possible for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent, how often I wanted to gather your children as a bird gathers her brood under her wings, but you did not wish it. Look! your house is left to you, and you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:35).

A woman relates to the image of a bird gathering its brood under her wings. She has seen it many times. As woman she has gathered children and others for feeding, safety, security, and community,—for life. She understands the image. Somehow, like her, Jesus has gathered a community. This community shares with him the work of rising up, of expelling evil spirits, of curing, and of completing the work of resurrection, of renewal on the third day. But she has known those who would not be gathered, who would not partake of the bread, who refused or ignored teaching, healing, and especially the work of the new life of resurrection. They cry and wail but they refuse to see. But finally when they learn to see, they will recognize the one coming in the name of the Lord.

PART FIVE:
CONFLICT AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITIES

1

THE TEACHING AND CONFLICT CONTINUE

Luke 14

The contradictions are plentiful as the narrative continues. Jesus goes to the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread, and they are carefully watching him to catch him (Luke 14:1). Many women can relate to such a situation when they sometimes feel others, rather than helping them, appreciating them, or affirming them, are, on the contrary, looking for an action or a saying by which they can be rejected, discriminated against, or made to feel inferior.

A man who has dropsy is placed before Jesus (Luke 14:2). This is the only reference in the New Testament to this disease. Is this a detail of Luke the physician? Tradition has supplied that interpretation. Dropsy is an accumulation of diluted lymph in body tissues and cavities. Clearly this person is someone who needs healing. Jesus asks the lawyers and the Pharisees whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not. The question is rhetorical in a number of senses. On the one hand, it is unlawful according to their statutes to heal on the Sabbath. But here, obviously, is someone who needs help. The lawyers and Pharisees remain silent. Jesus takes the man, cures him, and sends him on his way (Luke 14:3-4). We can imagine the women observing who identify with Jesus in seeing the need for healing. We can imagine them both

chuckling at the perceptiveness of Jesus' question and also angry at the silence of the authorities. We can see them rejoice when Jesus takes it upon himself to cure the man.

Jesus poses another rhetorical question: "Which of you will see a son or an ox fall into a pit and not immediately pull it up on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees and lawyers were not able to reply (Luke 14:5-6). No wonder! If son or favored ox fell into a pit, there would be no question as to the action called for. They would do everything they could to save the son or the ox. They would call all the neighbors. They would call everyone they could!

Next comes a story which Luke attributes to Jesus (Luke 14:7-11). He notes how certain persons who have been invited are choosing the chief places at the meal. He says to them: "When you are invited to a wedding, do not recline in the first places lest a more honorable person come and you will be told to take a lower place. In other words, don't sit at the head table unless you are invited! But when you are invited, take the last place. When the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, go up higher' and you will be radiant before those reclining with you. Everyone exalting himself will be humbled, and everyone humbling himself will be exalted."

Can we imagine the women witnessing these actions and hearing this story? By custom they were often not even provided the lowest seats but were relegated to the serving or cooking area or even outside. From such a perspective they could laugh at the arrogance of those choosing the first places and the delightful reversal by which those in the last places are invited to come up higher. This is exactly what Jesus is saying to them. They have been last. They have been abased and humble. Jesus will exalt them.

The banquet sayings continue: "When you make a dinner or a supper, don't call your friends, brothers, relatives or rich neighbors so that they will be obliged to return the favor. But when you make a party, invite poor persons, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed because it is not a situation of returning the favor, of being repaid. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

The banquet and wedding images are pointing to the kingdom both present and to come. It is a banquet and a kingdom for

everyone where justice will prevail. Women will not be excluded, nor will those who are poor, maimed, or blind. It is something unheard of to have such a societal reversal! The world is turned upside down.

One of those at table responds: "Blessed and happy is the one who eats bread in the kingdom of God!" (Luke 14:15). The group of sayings then opens up to the telling of the parable of the great supper or banquet:

"A certain person
made a great supper
and invited many
and sent his servant
at the hour of the supper
to say to those invited:
'Come because now it is prepared.'
And they began to beg off:
The first said: 'I bought a farm
and I am obliged to go out and see it.
I ask you: have me excused.'
And another said: 'I bought five yoke of oxen,
and I am going to try them.
I ask you: have me excused.'
And another said: 'I married a wife
and therefore I cannot come.'

"So the servant reported all these things to the householder.

"The householder was angry and told the servant:
'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes
of the city,
and bring in the poor and maimed
and blind and lame.'
The servant responded:
'Lord, what you commanded has happened
and yet there is room.'

"And the lord said to the servant:
'Go out into the ways and hedges
and compel them to come in
that my house may be filled,

> For I tell you that not one of those men
> who were invited
> shall taste of my supper'" (Luke 14:16-24).

We seem to find here a theme of Jesus' preaching that the kingdom is extended to all. It is not just for the elite of the establishment. On the contrary, for some reason these last do not accept the invitation to the banquet of the ages. In the mystery of God's largess, the invitation is extended to all, especially to society's marginal groups. They come to the banquet and they fill the house.

Women have almost always been marginalized. They are in this story in the allusion to the wife. The list of excuses is both laughable and pitiful. The phrases "to see a farm, to try the oxen, to marry a wife" place the wife in a subordinate position similar to or even less than property. Even today the emir of one of the mid-eastern countries is supplied with a teen-age virgin periodically. Then how do women respond to such a parable? On the one hand they are diminished by the assumed values within the culture. But if the maimed and otherwise disabled are the ones invited to the banquet, if they replace the formerly elite, then do women not hear that they are the ones invited to this banquet of the ages, this new kingdom, to which even the lowliest will be invited?

The next sayings are enigmatic and challenging to interpret. Crowds come and Jesus says: "If anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his father, mother, wife and children and his brothers and sisters, and in fact even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-26). The previous groups of sayings and parables have provided the call, a way of life, and a command of universal love. But what if a family member stands in the way? Eventually, if there is conflict, all must be subordinated to the call to be disciple. This is to carry the cross after Jesus. No doubt the importance of this kind of saying reflects the experience of Luke's community. A group of sayings a little farther along turns the table even more: "You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by everyone because of my name" (Luke 21:16-17). Luke describes communities which have been sundered and which experience great rejection.

Is this too much to ask? What if a person plans to build a tower? Shouldn't one count the cost ahead of time? What if a king makes war? Shouldn't he consult to see if he can win the war? So shall the disciples say good-by to all their possessions. Salt is good, but if salt becomes useless, how will it be seasoned? It is not suitable for soil or for manure, but they throw it out. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear! (Luke 14:28-35).

How can a woman respond to these sayings and this parable? On the one hand, she certainly does not like to be marginalized or ignored. The temptation is to say: This is not a world in which I can find freedom. But the thrust of the sayings and the parable lead to another conclusion which is more profound. Jesus is one who brings healing, even on the Sabbath. Jesus is one who has little time for the arrogant, for those who take the first place at table. In fact, those who are humbled will be lifted up, will be exalted.

When a householder makes a supper, whom should he or she invite? Not friends, relatives, or rich neighbors, but the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. This is how you will find happiness and recompense at the resurrection of the just. This is the happiness of eating bread in the kingdom of God. The parable enlarges the theme: Go out into the ways and the hedges and compel them to come in! Are women in the ways and the hedges? Many women today certainly are, whether they are homeless, abused, or poor. In this story they are wanted so much by the householder that he compels them to come in to the banquet. Talk about joy! But what a mystery! Those men who were invited evidently are not able even to taste of the supper!

2

FINDING THAT WHICH WAS LOST

Luke 15

Luke places the saying about seeking the lost sheep in a context different from that of Matthew. Luke sets the scene with tax collectors and sinners drawing near to hear Jesus (Luke 15:1). Even here Luke is playing with ironies and sounds to suggest interconnections of meaning. First, we are surprised that it is *all* the tax collectors and sinners. These are the ones who are attracted to Jesus. These are the ones to whom he is attracted. The sounds relate these two groups. Tax collectors *(telōnai)* and sinners *(hamartōloi)* have much in common. Sinners are those who miss the mark, whose witness is jumbled and contradictory. Tax collectors are those who use the same kind of deception to extract taxes from the people for their own profit. "To hear" is a favorite word for Luke to describe discipleship, so it is explicitly ironic that it is these two groups who are drawing near to Jesus to hear him.

In contrast are the next pair, the Pharisees and the scribes. These are the ones we would expect to be drawing near to hear Jesus. In contrast to "drawing near" *(engizontes)*, they are "greatly murmuring" *(diegongyzon)* (Luke 15:2). They accuse Jesus of receiving sinners and eating with them. This pair of words "receives" *(prosdechetai)* and "eats with" *(synesthiei)* connotes the acceptance of one's presence and the companionship not only of

eating but also of sharing one's home and hearth, dwelling together, indeed of sharing one's household god or gods.

Luke elaborates the saying about the lost sheep into a parable. "What person having a hundred sheep and losing one does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost until she find it?" (Luke 15:4). The next sayings continue to play with the concepts of losing and finding. The sinner *(hamartolō)* is the one "having been lost" *(apolōlos)* (Luke 15:7). The sheep *(probaton)* is the one who goes before, who is guided and pushed forward. It seems likely that Luke would also have been familiar with the Latin word *probata* as suggesting those who are proved, tested, or approved, such as the disciples.

For Matthew the ninety-nine are left on the mountain, but for Luke the ninety-nine are left in the wilderness. In the Greek world view the mountains are associated with the mythological gods, a connection Luke wants to avoid. In a Greek museum one may see a statue of Apollo pictured with a heifer laid on his shoulders. In Luke's account the shepherd is pictured finding the lost sheep and laying it on his shoulders and rejoicing (Luke 15:5). There will be more joy over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance (Luke 15:7).

In typical style Luke then places a parallel story of a woman who has ten drachmas or silver coins. If she loses one, she lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and seeks carefully until she finds the lost coin. Then she calls together her friends and neighbors saying: "Rejoice with me because I found the drachma which I lost." So there is joy over one sinner repenting (Luke 15:10). Luke's placing a "woman's story" next to a "non-woman's story" a number of times makes us ask the questions: Does Luke as author want to show the parallelism of the stories? Or has he received traditions from separate women's communities which he then sets next to the more dominant traditions? Do we perceive the influence of a woman or women who associated with Luke and influenced the writing of his Gospel and Acts?

As an illustration of finding and losing Luke then tells the beautiful story of the prodigal son. The story is a classic of folk literature whether told in this form by Jesus, developed by the Christian communities, or developed by Luke:

"A certain person had two sons.
The younger said to the father:
'Father, give me the share of the property falling to me.'
And he divided the living to them.

"After not many days having gathered all things together
the younger son departed to a far country
and there living prodigally
he scattered his property.

"When he had spent everything
there came a severe famine throughout that country
and he began to be in want.

"And going he was joined to one of the citizens
of that country
and he sent him into his fields
to feed pigs
and he longed to fill his stomach
from the husks which the pigs ate
and no one gave him anything.

"But coming to himself, he said:
'How many of my father's hired servants
abound in loaves of bread
but I with famine here am perishing.

"'Rising I will go to my father
and I will say to him:
'Father, I sinned against heaven and before you.
No longer am I worthy to be called your son.
Make me as one of your hired servants.'"

"And rising up he came to his father,
but yet while he was still far off
his father saw him
and was moved with compassion
and running he embraced him
and fervently kissed him.

"And the son said to him:
'Father, I sinned against heaven and before you.
No longer am I worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants:
'Quickly bring out the first robe and clothe him
and put a ring on his hand
and sandals on his feet
and bring the fattened calf, kill it,
and let us celebrate and be happy
because this son of mine was dead
and now lives again.'

"'He was lost
and has been found.'
And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:11-24).

Although Luke's text then continues with the description of the elder son, some think that the original story ends with "and now lives again." Whether that is true or not, there are so many elements within the story, we can start with this much and look at the elder son section later.

The use of two persons or two sons is a classic story-telling and teaching device. The younger is typically the one with less wisdom. Many of us can identify with his foolishness. Certainly many in the Christian communities could identify with a life spent in waste and with a "wasteland" characterized by famine whether physical or spiritual. How many Christians had "fed the pigs" but had less than the owner's animals for themselves. Unfortunately, the same situation prevails today in many parts of the world. The prodigal son is one who is starving. The one coming into the Christian community was one who was starving for spiritual food, and perhaps physical food as well.

The prodigal son recognizes the situation that he is perishing *(apollymai)*. He is being lost. He will rise up *(anastas)* and go to his father, acknowledge his unworthiness, and ask for a place as a hired servant.

From a long way off the father sees him returning, is moved with compassion, runs to him, and embraces him. The son acknowledges his sinfulness, but the father calls for the first robe, the signature ring of authority and inheritance, and a celebration of the first order.

So those coming to the Christian community acknowledge their unworthiness, and their father not only supplies the bread

(arton) but the robe, the signature ring, and the banquet of inheritance. Such a son was dead and now lives again. Such a son was lost and is found.

There are other intriguing questions which tease the imagination. In the Christian community who is son of the father? Jesus?—Who was known as a wino and a party-goer? Jesus?—Who was considered by the Judas figures profligate with material goods? Jesus?—Who rises up and goes to his father? Jesus?—Who is given the first robe, the signature ring of authority, and the banquet of inheritance? Jesus in his resurrection? Did some of the early Christian communities think in these terms? There is certainly enough evidence to point in that direction.

But what about the elder son? The elder son is *presbyteros,* a word associated not only with someone older in age but even with the ancients, as well as the elders of the Jewish Sanhedrin, often associated with the chief priests and the scribes, those who do not understand Jesus. The term was carried over into the Christian communities to refer to the elders who exercised authority and responsibility in the Church. It is the word from which comes our word "priest." The possible technical connotations of the word make us look again at the word for "younger" son, *neōteros,* which denotes the younger in age but also suggests someone fresher in the sense of upstart, making new, or revolutionary. The older son was in a field, outside, removed. As he came near the house, he heard music *(symphōnias)* and dances *(chorōn)* (Luke 15:25).

The elder son calls one of the young learners and inquires what these things might be. He answers: "Your brother has come, and your father killed the fattened calf, because he received his son back safe and sound," a phrase which has the sense of healthful, even sound in faith and teaching, uncorrupted (Luke 15:26-27). The elder son is full of wrath and does not want to enter the house. The irony is strong. If the elder son is heir to the wisdom and responsibility of the father, he should be disposed as the father is disposed, concerned for the good of the brother. His action betrays his lack of wisdom. He has not yet learned from the father the good of the whole, compassion, the absoluteness of love and family. He has not learned priorities. He should be happy that the brother is restored to life.

The father even comes out to him and entreats him to come to him, to take his rightful place. But the elder son ironically pouts: "I have served you all these years and never transgressed your command. And you never gave me a goat that I might make merry with my friends, but when this son who devoured your living with harlots came, you killed for him the fattened calf" (Luke 15:28-30).

The father is so gentle: "Child, you are always with me, and all my things are yours. It is right to be merry and to rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and came to life, was lost and also was found" (Luke 15:31-32). We are reminded of the youngest son Benjamin in the Joseph story, of the Mary and Martha story, of the disciples asking for the first places. Much as we may sympathize with the psychological feelings of the elder brother, the story makes clear the attitude of Jesus as understood by the Christian communities that love must transcend all, that a false righteousness is deadly, that however they viewed Jesus, the Jewish elders one with their God should have embraced Jesus and welcomed his resurrection. It is also important to note, however, that the father is gracious and loving to the elder. He goes out to him as he did to the younger. He entreats. He does not condemn or rebuke, but he reiterates that all he has belongs to the elder son. He continues to identify with him.

3

INSTRUCTIONS ON FORGIVENESS, FAITH, AND GIVING THANKS

Luke 16, 17

The Unjust Steward

The steward is complained about as wasting the possessions of the rich man (Luke 16:1). But "wasting" and "possessions" perhaps have other levels of meaning as well. The word for "wasting" here is *diaskorpizōn* which connotes a "scattering apart." "Possessions" *(hyparchonta)* connotes a property received at the beginning, the first inheritance. We have a clue to the focus in Luke 16:14: Now the Pharisees being from the beginning *(hyparchontes)* money lovers heard all these things and scoffed at him.

So in the parable the steward *(oikonomon)* (Luke 16:1) is the one who makes the rules of the house and distributes the inheritance. When the steward is accused of scattering the inheritance, he makes friends of the mammon of unrighteousness by lessening the debt of those who owe return to the inheritance. Mammon was the Syrian god of riches.

There is laughable irony in the comment that the lord *(kyrios)* (Luke 16:8) praised the steward of injustice because he acted prudently! The sons of this era of mammon are more prudent than the sons of light! "Make friends of the gods of injustice that when

it fails they may receive you into the tents of the ages." Then comes the punch line: "The one faithful in least is also faithful in much. The one unjust in little is unjust in more. If therefore you were not faithful in the riches of the unjust gods, who will entrust to you the true?" (Luke 16:10-11).

It is interesting that unjust riches are contrasted with true riches (Luke 16:11). "And if you were not faithful in that belonging to another, who will give you that which is our own? No household servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold fast to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."

Then Jesus addresses the Pharisees directly: "You are the ones who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts because the thing held up before men is an abomination before God" (Luke 16:15).

At first sight the next sayings seem disjointed, and it is possible to think that they are. But if we look for linkages, surprising connections turn up. As if in summary Jesus says:

> "The law *(nomos)* and the prophets *(prophētai)* were until John. From then the kingdom *(basileia)* of God is being preached and everyone is pressing *(biazetai)* into it" (Luke 16:16).

The two eras of the Jewish tradition are fulfilled when John the Baptist begins preaching the kingdom which everyone is now pressing into. However, this is fulfillment not replacement: It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than that the marking of one little letter should fail (Luke 16:17).

The next verse seems glaringly out of context, and in fact, many have interpreted it as an insertion or at least a rearrangement by Luke. For a writer as careful as Luke, why should a statement about divorce and adultery follow here? The line is typically treated as a moral injunction related to marriage. Whether or not it is, the context calls for another way of seeing its relationship to the preceding story of the unjust steward and the story of Lazarus which follows.

When we research the mention of marriage and adultery in the Scriptures, we find the words used much more to allude to the ruptured relationship of God and his people. Marriage is sign of

the covenant of faithfulness between God and his people. Adultery is the unfaithfulness and desecration of that relationship. If we read especially in the Septuagint version of Hosea, we find a vivid description of the adultery of Israel. It is not another covenant that is called for. God does not seek another people. God seeks a faithful people.

The following story of Lazarus confirms the imagery. A rich man clothed in purple and linen feasts merrily every day while a certain poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, is placed at the gate hoping to be satisfied by the crumbs left from the table (Luke 16:20-21). The poor man dies and is carried by the angels into the embrace of Abraham. The rich man also dies, is buried, and from Hades lifts up his eyes. He is in torment, but from afar he sees Abraham and Lazarus in his embrace. He begs Abraham to let Lazarus dip the tip of his finger into water to cool his tongue because he is suffering in such flame.

Abraham replies: "Child, remember that you received good things in your life and Lazarus the bad. But now he is comforted and you are suffering. Between you and us there is a great chasm so one cannot pass from one place to the other." The rich man asks that at least Lazarus be sent to the rich man's remaining five brothers so they will not come to the place of torment. Abraham replies:

> "They have Moses and the prophets:
> let them hear them.
> The rich man argues: 'No, father Abraham,
> but if someone from the dead should go to them,
> they will repent.'
>
> "Abraham replies:
> 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets,
> neither will they be persuaded
> if someone should rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:29-31).

The other mention in the New Testament of the name Lazarus is in John but the account of the raising of Lazarus is not in the Synoptics. In this Lukan parable Lazarus is also a resurrection figure, but as a poor man he is placed in contrast with the rich

man. The latter thinks he is true child of Abraham, but as one not careful of responsibility to the poor, he is unfaithful to the covenant. The story is an amplification of the earlier comment that the law and the prophets were until John, but that since that time the kingdom is preached and everyone presses into the kingdom. Here the point is enlarged to show that this rich man—the Pharisees had been called "money-lovers"—if they will not hear Moses and the prophets they will not be convinced even by someone who rises from the dead.

The parable operates on several levels. On one level it is a stark condemnation of money-lovers who care not for the poor, who are unfaithful to the covenant. It presents a rather simplistic view of the beggar named Lazarus, a name which means "God has helped." Lazarus has nothing but the help of God, but that evidently enables him to have faith which is rewarded. We are uncomfortable with the either/or structure of the story, but it evidently reflects experience of the Lukan community of contrasts between the rich and the poor, between those judged faithful to the covenant and those unfaithful, between those who hear and those who do not, between those who enter the kingdom, who believe one risen from the dead, and those who do not enter and do not believe. No doubt many of the poor in Central America or elsewhere can identify with the thrust of the story. For those of us who live in riches of whatever degree, the parable makes us squirm. That is the intent of the story.

Giving Thanks-Luke 17

In each section Luke is strengthening the argument, building his persuasion of the kingdom and of resurrection. The next line anticipates our response: "It is impossible for scandals not to come, but woe to the one through whom the scandals come. It profits him more to have a millstone put around his neck and be thrown into the sea rather than that he should scandalize one of these little ones" (Luke 17:1-2).

The sayings on forgiveness are a necessary counter-thrust to the starkness of the parable of the rich man in Hades. "Take heed to yourselves: If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents,

forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and seven times turns to you saying 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).

No wonder the apostles respond: "Lord, increase our faith." The Lord says: "If you have faith as a grain of mustard, you would have said to this sycamore tree: Be uprooted and be planted in the sea and it would have obeyed you." But the servant is to take no self satisfaction in serving: "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we ought to have done" (Luke 17:5-10). Forgiveness, faith, and a lack of self-righteousness are three marks of the disciple faithful to the covenant.

Not only a beggar, but even a leper can understand this relationship. The narrative follows Jesus through the midst of Samaria and Galilee to Jerusalem. (This is one of the places which makes us question Luke's geography. To go to Jerusalem one would ordinarily pass from Galilee first through Samaria. But Luke's geography is more often theological and structural to the story.)

Jesus enters a certain village and is met by ten lepers who stand afar off. They lift up their voices and say: "Jesus, faith-teacher, have compassion on us." Jesus acknowledges the health institutions of the time. He does not even say to the lepers that they are cured. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests. The Temple priest is identified as *hiereus,* not *presbyteros.* As the lepers are going, they are cleansed. When he realizes that he is healed, one of them turns back and with a loud voice gives glory to God. He bows down at the feet of Jesus thanking *(eucharistōn)* him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus says, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found returning to give glory to God but this stranger?" The contrast is between those who presumably should give thanks and the stranger who is not heir of the same covenant. The surprise is that the outsider is the one who not only returns to Jesus, but who gives glory to God, thanks Jesus and to whom Jesus says: "Rising up *(anastas),* go, your faith has made you whole" (Luke 17:11-19).

Once more women and other outsiders or marginal persons would recognize that Jesus identifies them with those who understand, with those who do not have the status of the "faithful," but

those, in contrast with the established believers, who "give thanks," "rise up," and have a faith which heals them, which makes them whole. The vocabulary suggests a Eucharistic community reflecting on faith, giving thanks as Eucharist, and rising up as resurrection in Christ.

What is the kingdom to which they are invited? The Pharisees ask the same question, to which Jesus replies: "The kingdom of God is within you." The implication is that the Pharisees are looking for the kingdom in the wrong places (Luke 17:20-21).

The disciples have a similar problem. Jesus tells them that they too will look in various places, but the son of man will come like lightening. But first this son of man will have to suffer and be rejected, just as in the days of Noah and of Lot. In the day of revelation, one shall be taken, and one shall be left (Luke 17:22-32, 34).

> "Whoever shall seek to lay up treasures for his life
> shall lose it,
> and whoever will lose
> shall bring forth new creation in his life" (Luke 17:33).

4

MORE TEACHING FOR DISCIPLES

Luke 18

Luke supplies two more parables unique to his account: the parable of the unjust judge and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:2-13). Luke's treatment of women is mixed. Sometimes he places them in a positive light, as we have seen a number of times. Sometimes he refers to them in a neutral way. This was the case in the previous allusion to one being taken and one being left, where he gives examples first using a masculine pronoun and then a feminine (Luke 17:34-35). But in this parable of the unjust judge, a widow is described in what seems to be a pejorative way, but which on further examination identifies her with those who understand discipleship.

The parable illustrates how one must always pray and never give up. The word for "pray" provides an interesting construct. It suggests not only asking for something but also the notion of commitment and vow or dedication. Prayer is an important theme for Luke. Often he pictures Jesus praying, but he also shows Jesus teaching others to pray. This parable and the next ones amplify various aspects of the importance of prayer for a disciple.

The injunction to pray is contrasted with the caution not to faint or be weak. The story describes an urban judge who doesn't

fear God and who doesn't respect persons. In the same city is a widow who comes to the judge asking for vindication from her opponent (Luke 18:2-3). It is easy to see today's parallels of those who are poor, especially poor women, who generally lack legal recourse, who often are given the "run around," and who are easily oppressed by bureaucratic and legal systems.

Like many busy judges he ignores her for a while. But this woman is persistent: She keeps coming back (Luke 18:4-5). Her continual coming wears him out! The parallel is drawn: If an unjust judge can be prevailed upon, will not God vindicate those he has chosen who bellow out to him day and night? Will he not be patient with them? Nevertheless, will the son of humanity when he is coming find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:6-8).

The second parable contrasts two men who go up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed within himself: "I thank you God that I am not as the rest of men—rapists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give to the Temple a tenth of all I receive" (Luke 18:12).

But the tax collector stood afar off, wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, acknowledged his sin and asked for mercy. Jesus says: "This tax collector went down to his house justified rather than the other one because everyone who lifts himself up to the heavens will be brought to a low condition and the one acknowledging his low condition will be lifted up to the heavens." The latter *chiasmus* paints an ironic paradigm of discipleship, whether the disciple called is judge, widow, Pharisee, or publican (Luke 18:14).

It is the children in the next sayings who best exemplify the attitude needed for discipleship. Children are brought to Jesus that he might touch them (Luke 18:15). What does the touch imply? Blessing, relationship. When they see this, the disciples rebuke those bringing them, and the children, too, we presume. But Jesus calls them to him. He calls children, and he also calls those who are childlike.

How many women can identify with those in this scene! So often, mothers or other women, of necessity or of choice, bring children with them to an event—even to church!—and are rebuked

silently, if not aloud, for bringing them. Women then and now recognize in Jesus someone different who welcomes them and their children, who contradicts the false righteousness of those who look down on the little ones in our communities. Not only does he welcome them, but he solemnly says that of such children is the kingdom of God. Moreover, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child (*paidion,* "a learner") by no means enters into that kingdom (Luke 18:15-17).

The lessons in discipleship continue. A certain ruler questions Jesus: "Good teacher *(didaskale)* (Luke 18:18), what must I do (*poiēsas*—accomplish, create with my life) in order that I may inherit the life of the ages?" This is not an idle question. This is the question which is the whole thrust of Jesus' teachings and of the call to discipleship embodied in the Gospel.

But first, Jesus contradicts the ruler by saying that no one is good but God (Luke 18:19). On one level this identifies Jesus with the brokenness of the human experience. There is also included the irony recognized by the Lukan community of the unity of Jesus with God. Jesus answers simply (Luke 18:20): "You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother."

Every Jewish person would be very familiar with these injunctions recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Like other persons of upright demeanor, the ruler can say: "I have kept all these from my youth." Since he apparently is asking for more direction, Jesus hears him and is willing to continue the dialogue: "One thing you still lack: Sell all you have and distribute to poor people, and you will have treasure in heavens, and come follow me" (Luke 18:21-22).

The young man also hears Jesus. He understands the call to give more, but he grieves because he is very rich. Jesus sees the grief and comments that it is hard for those who have property to enter into the kingdom of God. The man who is hearing then asks who can be saved. Jesus replies that the things which are impossible with men are possible with God (Luke 18:18-27).

No wonder the message of Jesus was so encouraging to women and those others who lacked property. Not only will property not buy entry into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do not have

property are freer to enter into this kingdom, freer to be saved. Even today, it is often the marginalized, propertyless persons who most easily hear and respond to the call to be disciples. Jesus' comment holds true: "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).

Peter then speaks for those who have followed Jesus: "Leaving our own things, we followed you." Jesus extends and summarizes the point he is making: "There is no one who left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who shall not receive many times over now and in the coming age life eternal" (Luke 18:28-30).

The next verses summarize the main faith belief about Jesus. They are presented in the formal context of Jesus taking the Twelve apart and telling them that they are going up to Jerusalem where all the things written through the prophets regarding the son of man will be accomplished:

> "He will be delivered *(paradothēsetai)* to the nations
> and will be mocked *(empaichthēsetai)*
> and will be insulted *(hybrosthēsetai)*
> and will be spit at *(emptusthēsetai)*
> and having scourged him
> they will kill him
> and on the third day
> He will rise *(anastēsetai)"* (Luke 18:32-33).

No doubt we have here a summary of the faith from the early Christian community. Similarity of sound and of syllables, as well as the parallel structure enable prospective disciples to learn and remember more easily this important creed. How telling, then, is the comment:

> and they understood none of these things
> and this word having been hidden from them
> and they knew not the things being said (Luke 18:34).

It seems that the disciples did not understand the nature of Jesus' mission, as often in the Christian communities the new disciples found this a hard saying. The same is true today. We do not

like a Messiah, a Christ, who suffers, who is mocked and spit on, much less put to death. We can be sure that the women in Jesus' day were as distraught at suffering as we are, but as those whose ministry was preparation of the dead for burial rites, they had handled bodies broken, damaged, violated. Their ministry built in them a courage and a hope, so that they could transform their pain into belief that on the third day he will rise again, that death must give way to new life.

Not only the women but also those others treated as marginal in the society of the time understood the nature of suffering and the courageous hope necessary to endure and move through suffering into new life. Thus the next two stories tell of two persons considered marginal in the culture of the time (Luke 18:35-43; 19:1-10). Both stories are associated with the city of Jericho. The second one is unique to Luke's Gospel.

What is the background suggested by the site of Jericho? (Luke 18:35; 19:1). The city is very ancient, perhaps the first inhabited city of pre-historic time. It is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures largely in connection with Moses and Joshua on the other side of the Jordan, planning to cross over into the promised land, and the consequent destruction of Jericho and parceling out of the land nearby to the children of Israel.

In Luke's narrative, after Jesus takes the Twelve he says: "Behold we go up to Jerusalem and all things written by the prophets will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31). Like Israel led by God through Moses and Joshua, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem through the city of Jericho with all that such a journey signifies. In the Septuagint the Greek name *Joshua* is the same as the Greek name *Jesus (Iēsous)* in the gospels. In Jesus are recapitulated the highlights of the salvation story of the Lord leading his people out of slavery into freedom. But the story is radically transformed in the new interpretation Jesus and his communities bring to the story. Here there is not destruction but a call to the outsiders and oppressed of his society to see anew, to come follow his way, and to praise God for this new found salvation and wholeness.

The first pericope is of a certain blind man who sat by the *way* begging. He hears the crowd passing by and inquires what this might be. He wants to learn. And they reported to him . . . .

The word "reported" is a favorite of Luke, used even more in the Book of Acts. The word *(apēngeilan)* (Luke 18:37) connotes a narrative and resembles the word for preaching the Gospel *(euangelizomai)*. And what do they report? Jesus the Nazarene is passing by. To the incoming Christian community Jesus is also passing by. Like the blind man they should cry out, "Jesus, son of David, pity *(eleēson)* me." In the Greek and later Roman liturgy, this will become Kyrie eleison: Lord have mercy. Those going before—presumably the Twelve mentioned in the previous sayings who did not understand—rebuke him that he should be quiet. Like the children he is rebuked by those who should understand but who do not. The blind man ignores their rebuke and cries out all the more: "Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:39).

Jesus stops and commands him to be brought to him. The man draws near as those learners in the Christian community draw near. He questions the blind man as he questions them:

> "What do you wish that I may do for you?"
> "Lord, that I may see again."
> "See again: Your faith has healed you."
> And at once he saw again,
> and followed him
> glorifying God.
> And all the people seeing
> gave praise to God (Luke 18:41-43).

PART SIX:
CONFLICT, PASSION, AND RESURRECTION

1

THE CONFLICT GROWS

Luke 19

In the previous story Jesus *drew near* to Jericho. In this next pericope, like the people of the Exodus, Jesus has *passed through* Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. In the former account, the blind man had been healed. Now we have the story of a man chief among the publicans or tax collectors who is despised by the establishment and by most of the people because he collects their funds and sends them on to support the hated Roman causes. The man is called Zacchaeus. Like another Zacchaeus named in Maccabees (2 Macc 10:19), this man is also considered a traitor for cooperating with the oppressor.

There are two other characteristics named which make him in the context an unlikely candidate for admiration. He is rich and he is short. Nevertheless, he wants to see Jesus but is unable because of the crowd and his little *(mikros)* stature. He is surprisingly "a little one." He runs forward to the front and goes up onto a sycamore tree so that he might see Jesus who is going to pass along this *way* (Luke 19:2-4).

Those early Christians or those becoming Christians could identify with this unlikely person interested in seeing Jesus. Like him they are called to find a place from which they can see Jesus as he comes along.

As Jesus comes to the place, he looks up and says: "Zacchaeus, make haste, come down! for today it is necessary for me to remain

in your house!" Making haste, Zacchaeus comes down, and welcomes him rejoicing (Luke 19:5-6). From a structural point of view, the story is intriguing. Zacchaeus is small in stature, he runs forward, he goes up onto a tree so that he may see. Jesus passes through Jericho; now he is passing along. Jesus comes to the place where Zacchaeus is, looks up, tells him to make haste to come down. The little man comes down and welcomes Jesus rejoicing. In the previous story, the blind man had sat by the way side. In this story, the little man goes high up on a tree. Whatever the reason for not being able to see, the one who wants to see uses the resources at hand, whether calling out or climbing up. Jesus responds to such efforts and confirms a faith which seeks him.

In both cases, the on-lookers, "they," rebuke or murmur. The blind man should be quiet; the little man is a sinner. The blind man asked for mercy; Zacchaeus says to the Lord: "I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false assessment, I restore fourfold" (Luke 19:7-8).

Jesus had said to the blind man, "Receive your sight. Your faith has made you whole." To Zacchaeus he says: "Today salvation has come to this house because even this man is a son of Abraham." These are two different ways of saying the same thing. Wholeness and salvation are in Jesus—are Jesus. As faith brought wholeness to the blind man, so Zacchaeus acts in the spirit of the father of faith—Abraham, and this brings him salvation or wholeness. The two parables are summarized in the *inclusio:* "The son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), which at the same time is a call to the community of hearers and the persons within those communities to know that Jesus is seeking them, whatever their blindness, shortness of stature, or sinfulness.

The Parable of the Nobleman

The plot moves on in Luke's geography. Now the scene is near Jerusalem, the name of which in popular tradition signifies city of peace. Since Jesus is coming to the capital, "they"—the antagonists provided by Luke—think that the kingdom of God will immediately appear (Luke 19:11).

Comparison with parallels in the other Synoptics raises interesting questions about interpreting this parable. In Mark (Mark 13:34) there is the simile of a man going on a journey, putting his servants in charge, and commanding the doorkeeper to keep watch. Matthew (26:6-13) describes the distribution of talents: five, two, and one. Besides the rewards to those who earned more talents, and condemnation to those who hid the talents, the story ends with the casting of the worthless servants into exterior darkness.

The three synoptic accounts are set within the context of a coming in judgement. They reflect the world views of those expecting devastation, justice, and the separation of those who used their gifts as good servants from those who rejected the rule of the lord or who did not use what was entrusted to them. In Luke's version, the story is preceded by warnings to the nation, a lament over Jerusalem, a banquet from which those who were first invited are excluded and the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame are invited instead. In this context, then, the parable of the pounds describes a coming judgement—one already seen by the gospel communities in the dramatic destruction of Jerusalem, in the devastation of the dominant structures associated with the Temple, and in the death of many Christians.

Luke's account (Luke 19:12-27) names the man as a nobleman who goes into a far country to receive a kingdom and return. He entrusts ten servants *(doulous)* with ten pounds, perhaps the equivalent of three months' wages in contrast to the possible value of Matthew's talent as fifteen years' wages for a laborer. The citizens *(politai)* hate him and send a delegation *(presbeian)* after him saying: "We do not want this person to reign over us." The three words underlined may give us a clue to their relationship. *Doulos* is not only a subservient slave, but it may also connote a dedicated servant or minister such as a prime minister. The cognates of *presbeian* may connote not only a delegation but also elders, a body of seniors with authority. The word resembles *presbyteros,* translated as elder, but also as presbyter or priest, and even a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin or governing body. The citizens are voting members of a polity, typically the property owners as contrasted with the poor who have no property and no vote. The elders say: "We do not want this man to reign over us." Do we have, then, a

description of the ruling classes who hated Jesus, who do not wish his rule?

Whatever the connections, on the return of the lord, the one who increased his pound to ten is called a good servant and is placed over ten cities. The one who returns five pounds is placed over five cities. The one who hides his pound in a napkin *(soudariō)* is rebuked for not using the money as investment. In fact, the one pound is taken away and given to the person who has ten. The lesson is summarized in a saying: "To everyone who has, it will be given. From the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken. Moreover, those not wishing me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me." And having said these things he went before them going up to Jerusalem (Luke 19:26-27).

Do we have here a parable of Jesus treasured in an earlier source, or perhaps a story current in the Near East, developed by Luke and Matthew? Whatever the source, the tale relates a moral about using talents or money, which is metaphorically applied to the gifts of covenant and grace bestowed on the Jewish people as well as on Christians. The pericope is linked here to the Zacchaeus story by reason of the collecting of taxes and the investment of money through the use of banking tables.

But why does Luke use the term pound *(mna)?* Is there an allusion to *mnama* (a memorial of the dead) or *mnēma* or *mnēmē* (memory)? If so, is there a connection with *soudarion* or napkin/cloth? This is the only time Luke uses the word, but John uses it as the head wrapping of Lazarus as he emerges from the tomb (John 11:44) and as the head wrapping found in the empty tomb by Simon Peter in the first Sabbath resurrection narrative (John 20:7).

The King Enters Jerusalem

Many images from the Jewish culture and from the Hebrew Scriptures form the background of the next story. References to the joyful coming of a king, to laying the garments out as a recognition of kingship, to the king riding on a colt, to followers shouting with joy provide the background for describing the entrance

of Jesus into Jerusalem. Implicit or explicit references to Zacharias, Isaiah, or a psalm supply the language to interpret the event. When they come near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples to find the colt on which no one has yet sat: The Lord has need of it. The disciples cry out: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the high places!" (Luke 19:38). Some of the Pharisees call Jesus "Master" and ask him to rebuke his disciples, but Jesus answers that if they should be silent, the stones would cry out (Luke 19:40).

Luke next pictures Jesus weeping over the city and describing the siege and destruction of the city (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus then enters the Temple and throws out those who are selling. He tells them: "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers" (Luke 19:45-46). Two verses summarize the unfolding action: Jesus was teaching daily in the Temple. The chief priests and the scribes, as well as other leaders of the people, sought to destroy him but could not find what they might do, for all the people hung upon him to hear him (Luke 19:47-48).

2

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Luke 20

In the next section not only is Jesus teaching the people in the Temple, but he is "preaching good news" *(euangelizomenou)* (Luke 20:1). The chief priests, scribes, and elders come upon him and say: Tell us by what authority you do these things. Or who is the one who gave you this authority?

"Authority" (*exousia)* is an important concept in the New Testament world. It denotes the responsibility and power associated with the householder as leader and coordinator of the family or tribal group. The word appears in the temptation story as the *authority* offered by the devil (Luke 4:6). But in forgiving sins, Jesus speaks of the *authority* of the son of man on earth (Luke 5:24). The centurion speaks of himself as one under *authority* (Luke 7:8). Jesus calls the Twelve and gives them power and *authority (dynamin kai exousian)* over all the demons (Luke 9:1). He gives the seventy *authority* to tread on serpents and scorpions (Luke 10:19). Fear the one who has *authority* to cast into hell (Luke 12:5). They will bring you before synagogues, rulers, and *authorities* (Luke 12:11). The one faithful with the ten pounds is given *authority* over ten cities (Luke 19:17). At the beginning of the passion, Jesus says to his enemies: This is your hour and the *authority* of the darkness (Luke 22:53).

In typical rabbinic style Jesus answers with a question: "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" The chief priests and scribes are faced with the classic dilemma. If they say "heaven," it follows that they should believe Jesus. If they say "men," the people who believed in the Baptist as prophet would be liable to stone the unbelievers as blasphemers (Luke 20:6). They take the non-committal route: they don't know. Now Jesus has them: Neither will he tell them by what *authority* he acts (Luke 20:7-8).

The Parable of the Vineyard

The vineyard is a basic image in the Jewish-Christian tradition. The lord of the covenant is pictured as the lord of the vineyard. In Isaiah Chapter 5 is the beautiful poetic parable of the song for the beloved:

> Let me sing for my beloved
> a love song concerning his vineyard:
> My beloved had a vineyard
> on a very fertile hill.
> He digged it and cleared it of stones,
> and planted it with choice vines. . . . (Isa 5:1, 2a)
>
> He looked for it to yield grapes,
> but it yielded wild grapes. . . . (Isa 5:2b)
>
> For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
> is the house of Israel,
> and the men of Judah
> are his pleasant planting;
> and he looked for justice,
> but behold, bloodshed;
> For righteousness,
> but behold, a cry! (Isa 5:7)

It is against the setting of such imagery that we have the synoptic parable of the vineyard entrusted to caretakers. The caretakers are referred to in English translations as either tenants or husbandmen. The connotation of tenants comes from the verb

"let out" and the concept of husbandmen from the word *geōrgois* which connotes those who work *(ōrgoi-)* the earth *(gē-)*.

The owner is away for a long time, but then he sends a slave *(doulon)* to receive the fruit of the vineyard. The *geōrgoi* beat him and send him away empty. The owner sends another slave, but they beat him also, insult him, and send him away empty. He sends a third: This one they wound and throw out (Luke 20:9-11).

The owner says: "What may I do? I will send my beloved son *(huion mou ton agapēton)*. Perhaps they will respect him" (Luke 20:13).

But when the tenants see him, they debate with one another, saying: "This is the heir—let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours. Throwing him out of the vineyard, they kill him" (Luke 20:14-15a).

"What therefore will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy these tenants and give the vineyard to others." Those hearing say: "May it not be!" Jesus looks at them and says:

> "What therefore is written is this:
> The stone rejected by those building
> came to be the head of the corner.
> Everyone falling on that stone
> will be broken in pieces,
> but whoever it falls on,
> it will crush him to powder" (Luke 20:15b-18).

The scribes and chief priests sought to lay hands on him from that hour and they feared the people for they knew he told this parable against them (Luke 20:19).

What can we say of this parable? The phrase "my beloved son" *(huion mou ton agapēton)* (Luke 20:13) links the story with two other synoptic narratives, that of the baptism of Jesus and that of the transfiguration, in which Jesus is called "my beloved son." It is reasonable, then, to see the beloved son of this parable as Jesus. If that is the case, then Jesus is also the heir. He is the one whom the tenants kill and throw out of the vineyard in order to claim the inheritance. By deduction then the tenants who kill the son are destroyed by the owner, by the father of the beloved son.

It is reasonable to interpret the story as a possible prediction, one not too difficult to arrive at. But it may also be a reflection on the overpowering events of the Jewish war of 68–73 C.E. in which most of Israel was destroyed, including the magnificence of the Temple and all it represented of at least one thousand years of Jewish tradition. If so, we can understand the linkage to the stone rejected by the builders which becomes the head of the corner and the reference to those broken in pieces and crushed to powder.

What meaning does any of this have for women? Women, of course, are prime witnesses to the death of Jesus, the beloved son. Women were part of the experience of the horrible two year siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Persons beloved to them died in that destruction as well as in other parts of the war. They were aware of their tradition, such as that expressed in the mourner's lament in 2 Maccabees by the mother of seven sons, all of whom have died, all of whom she bore in vain.

Would those women who survived find in Jesus and in his teachings a new hope for peace, a new hope for life and community that would build a temple not made with hands? Would they find in Jesus a concept of mother and son which transcends the physical and which is not dependent on the physical? Would they find in this image of a son who is killed and thrown outside the vineyard an image of Jesus physically and spiritually thrown out of Jerusalem and all that it represented? a person gone down into death who will rise into new life and bring with him all those who have also gone down into death?

The experience of many women today witnesses to such a possibility: women in Guatemala whose children, family, and friends have gone down into death, and who hope for a resurrection; women whose children and friends perish in national or ethnic wars which seem futile; women whose children, family, and friends perish on the streets of the cities in the crack wars of genocide. Of course, it is not only these who perish. It is also the daughters who are abused to senselessness, the daughters who are victims of those same wars, the daughters who bring forth their own children to comparable situations of death, and who themselves go down into death. Such women look for justice and find bloodshed, look for rightness, and can only cry out in pain.

Questions of Authority

The same chief priests and scribes who sought to lay hands on him watched him and sent spies pretending to be just so as to deliver him to the rule and to the authority of the governor. They question him saying: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and you do not give hypocritical regard to persons" (Luke 20:20-21). The second sentence is an ironic contradiction of the first. Those who should be just are hypocritical. But it is they who though speaking ironically and hypocritically commend Jesus as not only just but as speaking and teaching rightly *(orthōs)*. Jesus is orthodox! On the basis of truth, Jesus teaches the way of God!

The question of authority is then posed: "Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?" (Luke 20:22) This is the same authority to which they want to deliver Jesus. Jesus recognizes their deviousness: "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription is on it?" They answer "Caesar's" and thereby condemn themselves. Jesus directs: "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:24-25).

This saying is packed with so much meaning. In the Roman world Caesar was also the god. Jesus is making a distinction that is within his Hebrew prophetic tradition. Whatever the human authority, such authority is not God. The statement also raises the question: What are the things that belong to God? Jesus has stymied them: They are unable to catch him in the presence of the people, they marvel at his answer, and they are silent (Luke 20:25-26).

In the second question of authority, it is not the spies but the Sadducees themselves who come to him. The Sadducees are those who deny a resurrection. They pose a question regarding interpretation of a law of Moses. If each of seven brothers takes a wife and dies childless, then each successive brother should take the woman to wife (Luke 20:27-33).

The question is not about the morality or immorality of such custom. Implicit in our view is the subjugated role of woman, although in the customs of the time referred to, taking the woman to raise up seed to the brother is at the same time giving the woman economic and social independence and respect. But their

question is about the resurrection: Whose wife shall she be? Their own sophistry condemns them.

Again Jesus cuts through their hypocritical deviousness: The children of this age marry and are given in marriage:

> ". . . but those counted worthy of the next age
> and of the resurrection out of death
> neither marry nor are given in marriage
> for they can die no more
> but are equal to the angels
> and they are children of God
> being children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36).

Just as the Sadducees had referred to Moses, so Jesus responds that even Moses at the bush, as he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob, pointed out that the dead are raised for he is the God not of dead persons but of the living, for all live to him. Certain of the scribes comment: "Teacher, you have said well." They dared not question him anymore (Luke 20:37-40).

Far from being a put down of women, this series of sayings overturns the accepted societal and religious worlds. Women are children of God. In the fullness of the resurrection women will no longer need to marry and be married. Nor will they be able to die anymore! They are equal to the angels. They are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36).

The authority of Caesar was addressed, then the authority of Moses. Next is the authority of David and the Christ as David's son. "How is the Christ to be David's son since David says: 'The Lord said to my lord sit at my right hand.' If David calls him lord, how can he be David's son?" (Luke 20:41-44).

The problem and the enigma may be that although the Messiah is of the line of David according to tradition, and according to Luke's own description in Luke 2:32, nevertheless the Christ transcends physical lineage. The Christ is one with the Lord. He "sits at the right hand," a metaphor of oneness with God (Luke 20:42).

Then as all the people were listening, Jesus said to the disciples: "Beware of the scribes wishing to walk about in robes and liking

greetings in the marketplaces and chief seats in the synagogues and chief couches in the suppers, who devour the houses of the widows and under pretense make long prayers: these will receive severer judgement" (Luke 20:45-47).

We can imagine the women listeners nodding their heads in acknowledging the abuses described but who are perhaps surprised at how strong the condemnation is. We may also wonder how the male disciples heard the caution. They are not to be as these scribes either in their love of honor or in their abuse of widows. A new way of thinking and acting is called for.

3

THE COMING OF A NEW ERA

Luke 21

The allusion to widows provides a link for the praising of the poor widow who puts all her living into the treasury. Jesus is pictured as seeing rich persons putting their donations into the sacred treasury while a certain poor widow puts in two copper pieces, small Jewish coins, evidently what she was allotted for her needs. Jesus comments that she has put in more than all the rest, since they gave out of their abundance, while she gave out of her want (Luke 21:1-4).

A contemporary version is that of widows such as the one who, although making a small wage herself, noticed women with their children on the street begging for food in exchange for work. The widow gathered four friends in circumstances similar to hers and they agreed to give a significant portion of their wages to the women poorer than themselves.

Why was the woman whom Jesus observed giving her living into the sacred treasury? We don't know. Some was no doubt used for the upkeep of the Temple and its staff and accouterments, but the welfare system which supported widows and their children was also part of the temple social structure. Did this woman perceive others with greater need? Was she returning to God what she considered an overabundance from the blessings she had received? We don't know. If we read carefully, we see that the text does not necessarily praise the woman for her action. Jesus says

only that she has given more from little than the rich from their abundance.

The sacred treasury then links to comments on the Temple and on the signs which will come before the end time. Some persons comment on how beautifully adorned the Temple is. Jesus says that days will come in which there will not be left a stone placed on stone which will not be overthrown.

The Lukan community as well as the other Gospel communities had heard witnesses who had seen the effects of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. In astonishment and horror they told of how not a stone remained upon a stone. The modern archeologist Kathleen Kenyon and others also witness to this event. One may still see in Jerusalem today beautiful and mammoth Herodian stones. It is as difficult for the modern observer as it was for the observers in Jesus' time to imagine how such stone structures could be destroyed. On the other hand, a teacher wise in the way Jesus was wise could read the signs of the times and know the transitoriness of even such beautifully dressed stones as those he observed. He could read the internal decay that would bring down the metaphorical structure as well as the stones themselves.

The persons ask when these things will happen and what sign there will be. Jesus responds with a description which he could have anticipated but which also narrates the events which no doubt took place in the early Christian communities in the decades following the death of Jesus. The Jewish writer Josephus provides a similar account.

Jesus advises them: "Do not be deceived. Many will come saying 'I am,' that is, claiming to be God, and 'The time is near.' Don't go after them. There will be wars and commotions. These things must happen first. Nation will be raised against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes and pestilences and famines. They will persecute you and deliver you to synagogues and prisons for the sake of my name. It will turn out for you to be a testimony *(martyrion)*" (Luke 21:7-13).

How did women hear these sayings? The Gospels, Acts, and other early accounts make it clear that these words barely summarize the horrors which many endured. Women were there through all the horrors of suffering and persecution. Women were

delivered to the synagogues and the prisons. They were led away before kings and governors for the sake of the name of Jesus. Women gave their lives as testimony *(martyrion)*. The poor widow of the earlier verses giving all her mite takes on new significance.

Jesus is pictured as reminding them not to practice beforehand how to defend themselves. Jesus will give them a mouth and wisdom which none of their adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. "You will be betrayed also by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of my name. But a hair of your head will by no means perish: in your endurance you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:14-19).

We can picture women hearing these things—whether from Jesus or from Luke: "But when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, know that desolation is near. Then let the ones in Judea flee to the mountains and those in the midst depart because the days of vengeance, all the things which were written about, are to be fulfilled. Woe to those who are with child and to those nursing at the breast. There will be great distress on the land and wrath on this people. And they will fall by the sword and will be led captive into all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by nations until the times of the nations are accomplished" (Luke 21:20-24).

"And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anxiety of nations in perplexity of the sound of the sea and of the waves while men faint from fear and expectation of the things coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the son of the earth coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to happen, stand erect and lift up your heads because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:25-28).

And he told them a parable: "You see the fig trees and all the trees—when they burst into leaf, you know that summer is near, so when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. This generation will not pass away until all things happen. The heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Luke 21:29-33).

"Pay attention to yourselves so that your hearts don't become burdened with overindulgence and drinking and anxieties of life and that day come on you suddenly as a snare, for it will come on all sitting on the face of the earth. Be watchful at every time begging that you may be able to escape these things about to happen and that you may stand before the son of the earth" (Luke 21:34-36).

Luke concludes by saying that in the days Jesus was in the Temple teaching and in the nights he went out and lodged in the mountain called Olives. And all the people came in the morning to him in the Temple to hear him (Luke 21:37-38).

Both women anticipating such horrors and those who had endured them would be in awe of the truth they heard. But at the same time, they would know that with their "mite" they were called in hope to stand erect and know that their redemption is near.

4

THE PASSION NARRATIVE

Luke 22

The Jewish feast of Unleavened Bread, also called Passover, is near, and the chief priests and scribes are seeking how to put Jesus to death, but they fear the people (Luke 22:1-2).

The feast of Unleavened Bread is of ancient origins, probably predating the celebration of Passover, but the two came to be observed together from ancient times. Fairly universal among peoples like the Jews of the Mideast was an agricultural festival of thanksgiving celebrated at the beginning of the spring harvest. In the Jewish tradition the feast became historicized and connected with the exodus of liberation from Egypt. Since the fruits of nature come from God, they are holy and are offered to God before they are used. To induce leaven is to induce a foreign matter, so the ritual required use of bread without leaven for a week. The unleavened cakes are *mazzoth* or *azyma*.

The word Passover generally designates the feast celebrating deliverance from Egypt as well as the yearling lamb eaten at the observance. As part of the ritualized banquet, the lamb is to be roasted entire and whatever is not eaten is to be burned the next day. In the tradition of Deuteronomy, the ritual of the lamb took on the elements of sacrifice which provided the early Christians with images to develop in their thinking about the event of Jesus' death.

Luke unfolds the plot by describing Satan the adversary as entering into Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve. Judas converses with the chief priests and the captains as to how he might betray Jesus. They agree to give him money. He fully consented and sought an opportunity apart from a crowd to betray him (Luke 22:3-6).

When the day of Unleavened Bread arrived, the day on which the Passover must be killed, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the banquet. They are told to go into the city where they will meet someone who will provide an upper room furnished. When the time came, Jesus reclined and the apostles with him (Luke 22:7-14).

Jesus says: "I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I will eat it no more until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." He takes a cup, gives thanks *(eucharistēsas),* and says: "Take this and divide it among yourselves. I will drink no more wine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:15-18).

Then taking a loaf and giving thanks *(eucharistēsas)* he broke the bread and gave to them saying: "This is my body *being given for you. Do this for my memorial." And after supper he took the cup saying: "This cup—the new covenant in my blood being shed for you"* (italics indicate different textual traditions) (Luke 22:19-20).

Betrayal and Lack of Understanding

"The hand of the one betraying me is on the table with me" (Luke 22:21). No greater affront could be described. In the Mideast, to share food is to share the bonding of family, with covenant of loyalty and responsibility. That someone should share food and fellowship, worse still, in the context of Passover, and yet betray is a contradiction which only heroic forgiveness can counter. Jesus as child of the earth will follow his destiny, but woe to the one through whom he is betrayed. How ironic is the response of those at table, all of whom will in some way betray Jesus. They debated among themselves who might do this thing (Luke 22:22-23). Nor is the irony lost on the community of Luke called to discipleship.

The argument of those at table escalates as they dispute in rivalry who seems to be the greater. Jesus replies:

> "The kings of the nations dominate, and those with authority are called benefactors. But not so with you: Let the greater become as the younger, the one governing as the one serving. For who is greater, the one reclining at table or the one serving? But I am in the midst of you as one serving. But you are the ones who have remained with me throughout my temptations. I appoint to you as my father appointed to me a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:24-30).

Again the ironies are heavy: In some ways the disciples have remained with Jesus, but their weaknesses and weariness are what is described. What is the kingdom which Jesus has from his father? What is his table? It is the kingdom of children, of serving, of suffering. Thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel? The poor do not sit on thrones or judge. Nevertheless, the poor and oppressed by reason of their condition provide judgement on their oppressors.

Judas is not the only betrayer. The adversary, the Satan, also attacks Simon, the leader. Jesus addresses him: "Simon, Simon, Satan begged earnestly to sift you as wheat, but I have asked that your faith might not fail, and that you in turn may support your brothers and sisters" (Luke 22:31-32). Simon protests: "Lord, I am prepared to go both to prison and to death with you!" (Luke 22:33). Jesus knows truer: "Peter, the cock will not crow before you deny three times that you know me" (Luke 22:34).

The ironies continue: When Jesus sent them forth without the security of wallet or sandals, did they lack anything? No. But now they should take wallet, garment, and even sword! Now what has been written—that Jesus should be reckoned with lawless people—is to be finished. They have *two* swords! The irony! Jesus says it is enough! (Luke 22:35-38). None of them seems to perceive any of the ironies.

After eating the Passover meal, Jesus according to his custom goes out to the mount of olive trees followed by the disciples. He tells them to pray not to enter into temptation. He goes off by himself as far as you can throw a stone. He gets down on his knees and prays that his father will take away this cup of suffering, but nevertheless, not his will, but his father's will be done. *An angel appears to strengthen him, but he is in an agony and prays more*

earnestly, so that his sweat becomes drops of blood that fall to the earth (italics indicate different textual traditions) (Luke 22:39-44).

Jesus gets up from prayer, finds the disciples sleeping from their grief, and tells them to rise and pray that they enter not into temptation (Luke 22:45-46). But while he is still speaking, Judas with a crowd draws near to kiss Jesus. Jesus asks him: "Judas, do you betray the son of the earth with a kiss?" Those around Jesus ask if they should strike with the sword. Without waiting for an answer, one of them strikes the slave of the high priest and cuts off his ear. In the Lukan version, Jesus touches the ear and cures him. Then Jesus asks the chief priests, the captains of the Temple, and the elders why they have come out against him with swords and clubs as though he were a robber. He was with them daily in the Temple and they did not stretch their hands out against him, but now is the hour and the authority of the darkness (Luke 22:47-53).

They arrest him and bring him to the house of the high priest. Peter follows afar off. A fire is kindled in the center of the courtyard and Peter sits down with the others. A certain maidservant sits near the light, gazes at Peter, and says: "This man was with Jesus." Peter denies it: "I do not know him." After a short while, another sees Peter and says: "You are one of them." Peter denies it again, even more strongly. An hour later, another one says that indeed Peter is a Galilean and was with Jesus. Peter denies it more vehemently. And at once a cock crows. The Lord looks at Peter, Peter remembers, and going outside weeps bitterly (Luke 22:54-62).

Then the ones who are in charge of Jesus mock him and beat him. They curse him and say: "Prophesy: Who is the one who hit you?" And blaspheming they say many other things against him (Luke 22:63-65).

When the day comes, the body of elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes assemble and lead him away to the council saying: "If you are the Christ tell us." Jesus says: "If I tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask you, you will not answer, but from now on the child of the earth is sitting at the right of the power of God." They all say: "You therefore are the son of God?" Jesus replies: "You say that I am." They reply: "Why do we still

need witness? for ourselves, we have heard from his own mouth" (Luke 22:66-71).

Once again, the young woman who is learning is the one who has the keenness of recognition. In contrast, those who should recognize and acknowledge him—Peter, the leader of the disciples; those who are in charge of Jesus; the body of elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes; deny him, mock him, beat him, curse him, blaspheme him, betray him, trap him, and witness against him. The young maidservant recognizes him. She tries to enable Peter to recognize him, but Peter replies: "Woman, I know him not" (Luke 22:57). The contrast seems clear both in the tradition and in the teachings being handed on to the new generations of Christians.

5

TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

Luke 23

The last verse of the last chapter flows into the first verses of chapter 23. "Why do we have need of witness? We ourselves have heard it from his mouth" (Luke 22:71). And rising up all the multitude of them led him before Pilate. They accuse him of three things: perverting the nation, forbidding tribute to Caesar, and calling himself Christ king (Luke 23:1-2).

In his position as judge Pilate then interrogates Jesus: "Are you king of the Jews?" Jesus replies: "You say it." But Pilate says to the chief priests and the crowds: "I find no crime in this man" (Luke 23:3-4).

The drama builds. They press the charges: He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee even to here. Pilate asks if he is a Galilean and therefore under the authority of Herod. Since the answer is yes, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod who is in Jerusalem for the feast. When Herod sees Jesus he is delighted because he has heard about Jesus as a wonder worker and hopes to see a sign, so he questions Jesus in many words, but Jesus remains silent (Luke 23:5-9).

Nevertheless, the chief priests and the scribes stand their ground and even vehemently accuse him. So Herod, with his soldiers, holds Jesus in contempt and mocks him, throwing around him gorgeous clothing, and sends him back to Pilate. Pilate and Herod become friends that very day, although they had been enemies previously (Luke 23:10-12).

Pilate then calls together the chief priests and the rulers of the people and says: "You brought this man to me as one perverting the people. I have examined him and found nothing in him regarding the crimes of which you accuse him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. He has done nothing worthy of death, so I will chastise him and release him." But they all shout together: "Take this man and release to us Barabbas" (who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection in the city and for murder).

Pilate calls them again because he wants to release Jesus. But they shout: "Crucify! You crucify him!" A third time Pilate says to them: "What evil did he do? I find no cause of death in him, so I will chastise him and release him." But they insist with louder voices asking for him to be crucified. The chief priests prevail so Pilate decides to carry out their request and releases the one who had been in prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivers Jesus to their will (Luke 23:13-25).

And as they lead him away, they seize Simon a certain Cyrenian coming from the country and place the cross on him to carry behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).

Like several other sections, the next is unique to Luke. It is noteworthy that it involves a dialogue in the context of the passion between Jesus and women who followed him. In Luke's culture as in that of most of the Mediterranean world, it was the role of women to mourn and lament the dead as well as prepare the body for burial or cremation. In this little section irony reverses roles and calls into question the presumed beliefs and attitudes.

And there follow him a great multitude of people and of women who mourn and lament him, but Jesus turns to them and says:

"Daughters of Jerusalem,
do not weep over me,
but weep over yourselves
and over your children,
because the days are coming
when they will say:
'Blessed are the barren
and the wombs which have not borne,
and breasts which never gave milk.'

"Then they will begin to say to the mountains:
'Fall on us
and to the hills:
Cover us.'
For if they do these things in a tree full of life,
what may happen in the dry?" (Luke 23:27-31).

The images and symbols in this section lead us in various directions. There is the background suggested by the address: Daughters of Jerusalem. The prophetic and wisdom literatures of the Hebrew scriptures often refer to a daughter of Zion or a similar title, but the plural "Daughters of Jerusalem" of Luke's narrative has more literary similarity with the usage in the Song of Songs (Cant 1:5; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8, 16; 8:4). Like the women-chorus groups of Greek drama which serve as interpreter, foil, personification of the people, voices of wisdom, so also the daughters of Jerusalem serve in the Song of Songs as the people of Jerusalem personified.

Against such a backdrop Jesus addresses the daughters of Jerusalem, the personification of the people of Jerusalem. The tone is similar to the irony and doom often present in the women's speeches in the Greek drama with which Luke and his community would have been familiar. Cosmic order and human order are reversed. The thrust toward perpetuating the people, toward life, is overthrown. Luke's community would, of course, also be familiar with the horrors of the actual situation of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. when from the siege we can hear echoes of the experience of actual women. The images are apocalyptic and prophetic of an end time. The images are appropriate backdrop for the horrors of the crucifixion.

Thus far, then, as witnesses in this journey of the cross, Luke has presented a man coming from the country, a group of women representing the people of Jerusalem. Next are those in the scene at the place called "Skull": the two criminals, one crucified on the right of Jesus, the other on the left. In some manuscripts, Luke has Jesus say: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Those who crucify him divide his garments by casting lots (Luke 23:34).

The people stand watching and scoffing and the rulers say: "Others he saved; let him save himself if he is the Christ, the anointed of God, the chosen one." The soldiers also mock him, offering him vinegar and saying: "If you are king of the Jews, save yourself." And there was a superscription over him: "This is the king of the Jews" (Luke 23:35-38).

Neither Mark nor Matthew picture the robbers or criminals as other than reviling Jesus, but Luke separates the reactions of the two. The first rails at Jesus and modifies the saying to an ironic statement of faith: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" The other thief, however, acknowledges the fear of God, the justice of his own condemnation, and exonerates Jesus. He says to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responds: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

There is darkness from the sixth to the ninth hour, from noon to mid-afternoon since the sun is coming to an end and the veil of the shrine in the middle is torn apart. The word for veil *katapetasma* means billowing out, even dominance, so that metaphorically, the dominance of the Jewish covenant, the era of the Temple is excised, cut apart, and therefore no longer valid (Luke 23:44-45).

In similar images each of the following verses builds a commentary on the cosmic impact of the death of Jesus. Jesus cries out with a loud voice: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." "Cries out" and "loud voice" reflect not only the medical and physiological description of Jesus at his death but also a proclamation of a new relationship of oneness of Jesus with his father. The word *commit* suggests entrustment related to inheritance. What is entrusted? The spirit of Jesus, the fullness of his life. But almost simultaneously he gives out his spirit; he dies, not in the sense only of a death and an ending but in the sense of handing on his spirit, his life, his fullness of life (Luke 23:46).

The centurion as Roman authority represents universal authority and therefore indisputable witness to events that are being fulfilled, that are coming to an end, but which at the same time, are arising or being brought into being. He recognizes the truth of the situation, glorifies God and says: "In truth, this was a just man." Instead of "just man," Mark and Matthew have "son of

God." Luke may wish to avoid here confusion with the Greek or Roman god system, which linked son of god to mythological or emperor structures of generation (Luke 23:47).

But as if this witness needs to be affirmed. Luke then adds that all the crowds, all the people come together, see what is happening, beat their breasts in repentance, and return. The word "return" may have the connotation of turning in conversion, a change of life.

A third level of witness is described in the next group:

> And there stood afar off
> all those known to him
> and women—
> the ones accompanying him from Galilee—
> seeing these things (Luke 23:49).

"Those *known* to him" is masculine and suggests an intimate relationship. "Women, the ones *accompanying* him" indicates discipleship. They see these things, but from afar.

The next verses are an account of Joseph of Arimathaea, a member of the council, good and just. It is surprising that in such close proximity, the same word "just" *(dikaios)* is used of Joseph as was used by the centurion to describe Jesus (Luke 23:47). Arimathaea is a city of the Jews, but is there also a play on words of Joseph as a near disciple? Matthew says he was a disciple, while Luke and Mark say he was looking for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:51). Is it only coincidence that just as a Joseph was present and witness at the birth of Jesus, so now a Joseph is witness of his death? The tradition of the patriarchal Joseph being buried in the promised land and the importance of burial also provide background for the story.

This man approaches Pilate, asks for the body of Jesus, takes it down, wraps it in linen, and places him in a tomb newly cut out of the limestone, in which no one had yet been laid (Luke 23:52-53). Matthew says the tomb belonged to Joseph. If Joseph had not taken the body, perhaps the body of Jesus, like some of those others crucified, would have been thrown in the nearby valley of constantly burning waste materials. Persons were buried in family tombs. Metaphorically, Jesus is buried with his ancestors and

within his Jewish tradition. Does this name of Joseph also suggest once more that symbolically Joseph or Israel takes Jesus as one of his own, even to burying him in his family tomb?

The word "tomb" *(mnēmati)* is a memorial, and thereby suggests a place to be remembered and returned to regularly according to the customs of the time. The newly cut tomb in which no one has been laid refers to the respect and uniqueness of Jesus but also suggests the newness of the event of Jesus.

The women who had come out of Galilee with Jesus follow after, see the tomb and how his body was placed probably near the front awaiting customary preparation for full entombment. They return and prepare spices and ointment. On the Sabbath they rest according to the commandment (Luke 23:55-56).

6

THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES

Luke 24

Although there are textual variations in the resurrection accounts which cause difficulties, Luke's narrative nevertheless provides images and overtones which are intriguing. There was a deep darkness on the tomb (Luke 24:1) *Orthrou batheōs* is often translated "very early," but the Greek suggests levels of connotation which are worth exploring. *Orthrou* connotes rising in the sense of dawn and the rising of the sun. *Batheōs* not only denotes a depth of darkness but also the depth of darkness associated with water, the "deep." This rising-depth is on or overshadowing the tomb. The Gospel community was familiar with images of water, darkness, mist, and rising sun.

The women come, carrying the pungent spices which they have prepared. The release of aromas whether through anointing or other action which transforms is a secondary image of rising. They find the stone already rolled away from the tomb. In colloquial Greek "stone" can refer to "blockheads" or stupid persons. At Athens, it was a name for various blocks of stone used for *rostra* or places to speak from and address the people. The stone has been rolled away (Luke 24:2).

Apparently there were several ways of closing the tomb. One was a rectangular stone which would be cut in such a way as to

close off the doorway to the tomb. All the synoptic writers, however, use a term which signifies rolling away. The doors of some tombs had cut at the threshold a gutter so that a circular mill stone could be rolled in front of the doorway. This fits the language used in the Gospels. The rolling concept is also related linguistically to the rolling motion of a mother giving birth.

According to the burial customs, the grave was typically lower than the ground by several feet and entered by steps or a decline. Inside the tomb would usually be a place to lay the body for preparation. Farther in the tomb might be niches in which the bodies of family members might be placed. We can picture the body of Jesus placed near the entryway.

The use of the word "stone" in other contexts in the synoptic tradition is interesting. In the temptation narrative the command is suggested that stone be made into bread (Luke 4:3) and that angels be called upon "lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Luke 4:11). "A stone will not be left upon a stone in Jerusalem" (Luke 19:44; 21:6). "The stone is rejected by the builders" (Luke 20:17). "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken" (Luke 20:18).

In this resurrection story they find that the stone has been rolled away. They go into the tomb, expecting to find the body, but they do not find it. They do not have the means for resolving this unexpected loss. A perplexity about this is rising in them when two men stand by them in shining clothing. Not only does Luke often have a preference for two persons in many of his accounts, but two are recognized as representing legal witness. In a similar way at his account of the ascension, Luke has two men as witnesses (Acts 1:10). The word for shining is related to the English word for stars and suggests an experience of light beyond the ordinary.

They become terrified and bend their faces to the earth. The men say to them: "Why do you seek the living with the dead?" (Luke 24:5). The assonance and ritual formulaic quality of this question point to a community insight of death transformed into life in marvelous irony! The men continue: "Remember *(mnēsthēte)* how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee" (Luke 24:6) saying:

"The son of man must be delivered
into the hands of sinful men
and be crucified
and on the third day rise again" (Luke 24:7).

And they *remembered* his words.
Returning from the *tomb,*
they reported all these things
to the eleven and to all the rest (Luke 24:7-9).

Who were these women referred to at the beginning of the story only as they? No doubt the question also arose in the transmission of this text from the community since we have variances in the texts which have been preserved. Moreover, we seem to have here a duplication of the list which appears in Luke 8:2. Is the list also an insertion there? Whatever the source, those listed are Mary Magdalen, Joanna, Mary (the mother) of James, and the rest (which is a feminine plural word) with them (also feminine plural).

They tell these things to the apostles to whom these words seem as idle talk, so they do not believe in the women's words (Luke 24:10-11). The irony is very humorous, because these apostles betrayed Jesus, denied him, were not with him in his traumatic passion, yet now they are not believing the women who know their business of dealing with the dead, of washing the body, anointing it, and preparing it for entombment. As with many of the healing stories, it is the marginal persons in society—women, prostitutes, non-Jews, Roman leaders—who recognize Jesus and who believe. This is humor, irony, and encouragement for the audience of Luke's Gospel who themselves may take positions similar to that of the apostles.

Major texts omit verse 12 which with John's account describes Peter as rising, running to the tomb, seeing the linen clothes, departing, and wondering.

On the Way to Emmaus

The next pericope is unique to Luke and tells the story of the two on the way to the little town of Emmaus about seven miles

from Jerusalem. Although the pronouns in subsequent verses are masculine and tradition has usually pictured the two as male disciples, the words "two of them" are not necessarily masculine. Some today prefer to picture the two as a husband and wife or even as two women. At any rate, the two are journeying to a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. They are talking to each other about all the things that have happened (Luke 24:13-14).

The two are conversing and trying to figure out what the experiences mean. Jesus himself comes along and journeys with them, but their eyes are so "entombed" that they cannot recognize him (Luke 24:15-16).

A discipleship-recognition dialogue ensues which is full of humor, irony, growth in discipleship and which includes a summary of Luke's theme of the story of salvation in Jesus. Jesus says to them: "What words are you throwing back and forth with each other as you are walking along?" (Luke 24:17). This sentence is laden with multiple levels of meaning. "What *words*" uses *logoi*—suggesting *meaning*, sentences of instruction. The word for "walking" is *peripatountes* which suggests to the hearer of Greek the peripatetic schools of the Greek philosophers who from Plato through Aristotle and including their successors walked around the forum with their students, striving to develop wisdom through conversation and intimacy of knowledge, "throwing words back and forth" with each other. So Luke is picturing Jesus as replacing those philosophers as he leads the disciples to insight about Jesus. "And they stood sad-faced," like the city guards at Athens who usually were slaves imported from barbaric areas representing the worst of sadness and boorishness!

One of the two disciples is named Cleopas which means "illustrious father"! In John's account of the crucifixion, Mary of Cleopas stands at the foot of the cross (John 19:25). Do we have here, then, a reference to a disciple considered an "illustrious father," and yet one who was such a slave or boor that he did not recognize Jesus? Or is the name merely one of coincidence?

This Cleopas, whether "illustrious father" or not, says to Jesus: "Are you the only foreigner in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things which are happening in these days?" In typical teacher style Jesus asks the simple question: "What things?" We can hear the

humor and the irony in the voice. In the story the two fall for the bait and at the same time provide a summary of early teaching about Jesus:

> "The things about Jesus the Nazarene
> who was a prophet
> powerful in work and word
> before God and all the people,
> how the chief priests and our rulers
> delivered him to the judgement of death
> and crucified him.
> but we were hoping
> that he is the one about to redeem Israel,
> and besides, this is the third day
> since these things happened,
> but also some women of our company astonished us,
> since they were early at the tomb,
> and not finding his body,
> they came saying they had seen a vision of angels
> who say that he lives,
> and some of our company went to the tomb,
> and found it indeed as the women had said,
> but they did not see him" (Luke 24:19-24).

Jesus responds: "O foolish and slow in heart to believe all the things the prophets spoke about! Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

They draw near the village and he pretends to journey farther, but they constrain him saying: "Remain with us because it is toward evening and now the day has declined." And he went in to remain with them.

> And it happened,
> as he reclined with them,
> taking the loaf,
> he blessed it,
> and having broken it,

he handed it to them,
and their eyes were opened up
and they recognized him,
and then he became hidden from them (Luke 24:30-31).

The resurrection stories unfold—first the witness of the women, then the witness of the two disciples journeying, and now their story flowing into the gathering of the Eleven. The two disciples recognize that their hearts were burning in them as he spoke to them on the way, as he opened to them the Scriptures. Just as they had walked with him "on the way," so now they identify with his rising up as they rise up and return to Jerusalem. They find the Eleven and those gathered with them. The gathering confirms the experience: The Lord really was raised and he has appeared to Simon! So the two disciples tell of their experiences "on the way" and how he was known by them in the breaking of the bread. And as they are saying these things he stands in the midst of them (Luke 24:32-36).

Becoming scared and terrified, they think they see a spirit. He says: "Why are you troubled, and why do discussions come up in your heart? See my hands and my feet, that I am myself. Feel me and see because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see me having." They can't believe it they are so joyful and marveling. He asks if they have any food. They hand him part of a broiled fish, and taking it, before them he eats (Luke 24:37-43).

Now he opens up for the Eleven the teachings and the story which he opened for the two:

"These—my words—which I spoke to you
while I was still with you
that it is necessary that
all the things be fulfilled
which are written in the law of Moses
and the prophets and psalms about me."

Then he opens their mind
to understand the Scriptures.
"Thus it has been written
that the Christ must suffer
and rise again out of the dead on the third day

and repentance for forgiveness of sins
be proclaimed in his name
to all nations
beginning from Jerusalem.

"You are witnesses of these things.
And behold I send forth
the promise of my father on you.
But sit in the city
until you are endowed
from height and power."

And he led them out toward Bethany,
and lifting up his hands
he blessed them.
And it happened that
while he was blessing them
that he withdrew from them.

And they returned to Jerusalem
with great joy,
and were continually
in the Temple
blessing God (Luke 24:44-53).

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How should a woman read the Gospel of Luke? What can she bring from her perspective that throws new light on the text? Is her view similar to or different from her counterpart in New Testament times who listened to the same stories? And what about those women mentioned in Luke who "ministered to them"? From these perspectives, Professor Dornisch, while relying on traditional historical, cultural, and literary interpretations, breaks new ground by asking new questions of the text.

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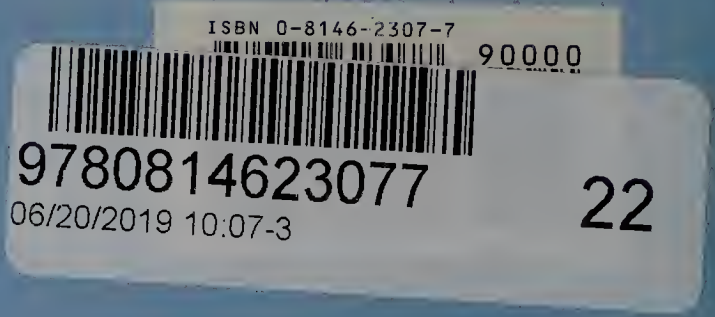

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